Amnesty dangerous, civil society group warns GMA

Story below, Col. I

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

SGV chief is new trade secretary

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday appointed Cesar A.V. Purisima, chair and managing partner of the accounting firm SGV & Co., as the new secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry replacing Manuel A. Roxas II, who resigned last week to run for a senatorial

SGV CHIEF/ A8

WHAT'S INSIDE

- **Political woes may drag peso to 56 to $1 next year** BUSINESS/B10
- **Public assured RP ready vs SARS** NEWS/A2
- **Robbers hit two provincial banks** NEWS/A2

email: feedback@inquirer.com.ph

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website: www.inq7.net

Bro. Eddie sure to run

EDWIN BACASMAS

IS HE or isn't he? Only he and Sen. Ping Lacson know for sure. But FPJ keeps the public guessing with surprise appearances, this one at the Christmas party of the PMAP also attended by Jinggoy Estrada.

Evangelist says only God can stop him

By Blanche Rivera and Norman Bordadora

ONLY GOD could make him change his mind.

Evangelist Eddie Villanueva, the spiritual director of the Jesus Is Lord movement, yesterday said he was 99 percent sure of running for president next year.

A popular preacher better known as Brother Eddie, Villanueva is running with the presumed support of JIL, which claims a membership of 7 million, mostly in the Philippines.

"I've reached a point after four months of praying, consulting, agonizing. There's an urgency to lead Bangon Pilipinas in establishing a righteous leadership because the country has reached a point of irreversible degradation," he said, referring to the political movement he launched earlier this week. (This is not the same group as the Bangon Movement headed by Vice President Teofisto Guingona.)

"I'll offer peace and a healing presidency," he told the INQUIRER.

Villanueva said there was still a one-percent chance that God would change the JIL leader's plans, citing the example of Abraham, whom God stopped from sacrificing his

BRO. EDDIE/ A17

Jacko charged, faces long prison sentence

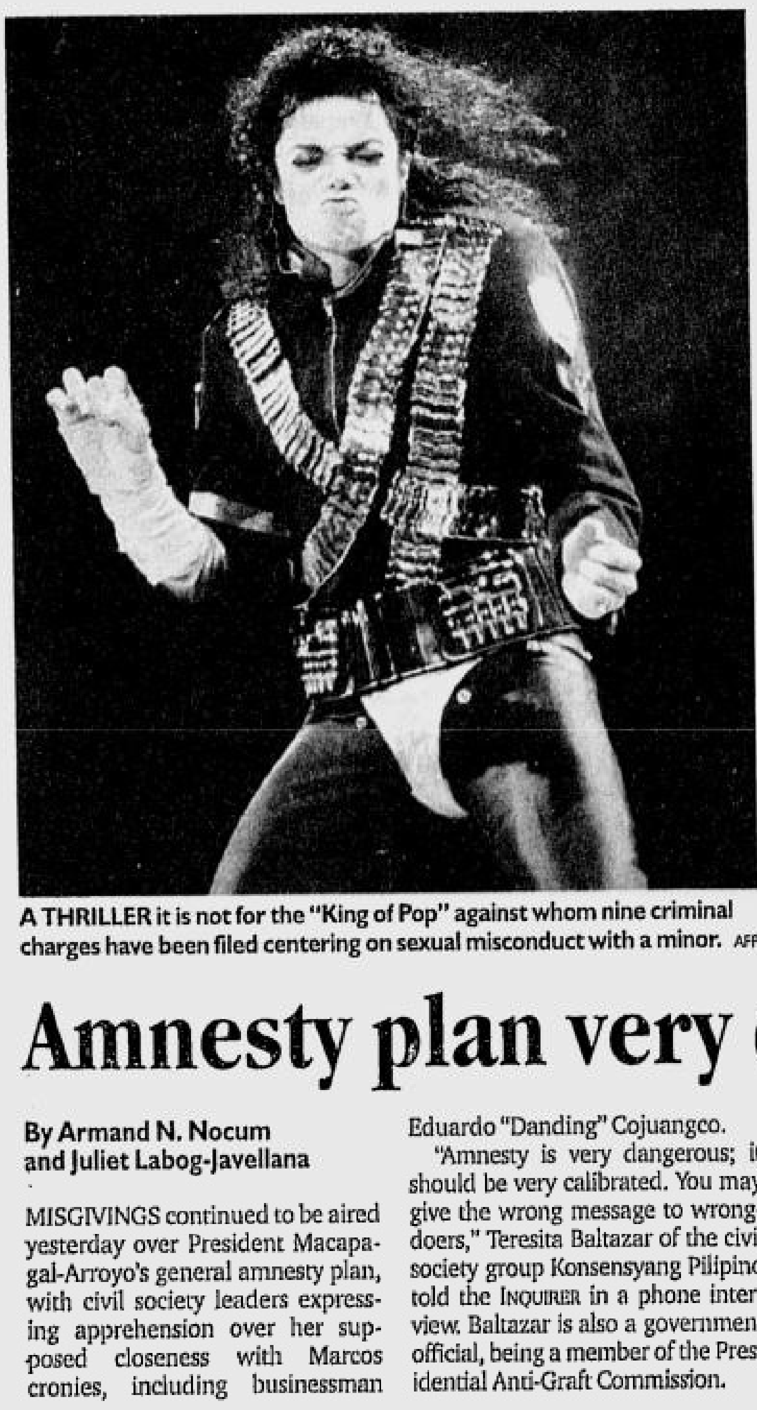
SANTA MARIA, California—"King of Pop" Michael Jackson Thursday was charged with sexually molesting a young boy after plying him with alcohol, allegations that could land him a hefty prison sentence.

But Jackson's lawyer hit back at the charges, saying the "King of Pop" was "unequivocally and absolutely" innocent and that he would fight the charges motivated by "money and revenge" with "every fiber of his soul."

Prosecutors near Jackson's fabled Neverland Ranch in California filed nine criminal charges against the beleaguered superstar and included a "special allegation" of "substantial sexual conduct" with a child under 14.

"There are several special allegations ... which, if found true,

JACKO/ A18



A THRILLER it is not for the "King of Pop" against whom nine criminal charges have been filed centering on sexual misconduct with a minor. AFP

Alliance means Danding's for GMA, says son

By Carla P. Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—A son of businessman Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr. yesterday upped the ante in the high-stakes game of politics saying his father, the founder of the Nationalist People's Coalition, may be said to be backing President Macapagal-Arroyo in the May 24 elections.

Twenty-five congressmen and 13 governors belonging to the NPC coalesced with the Lakas-CMD on

ALLIANCE/ A8

GMA uses hard sell on soldiers

By TJ Burgonio

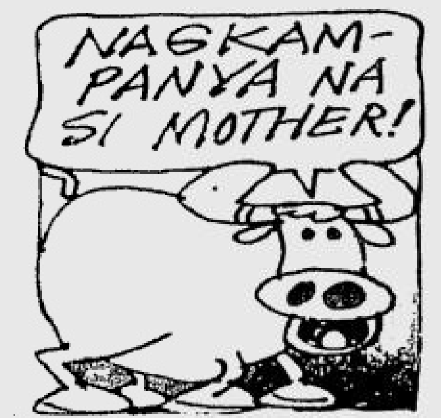
AND DON'T you forget it.

President Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday reminded the military of the largesse it was receiving under her administration, leading some soldiers to conclude that she was courting their support in next year's elections.

"As your mother, my children, I hope you don't forget that I raised your salary," the President told the troops in a speech at the Armed Forces' 68th anniversary rites at Camp Aguinaldo.

She said that as Commander in Chief, she always considered the welfare of the officers and men as one of

GMA/ A8



NAGKAMPANYA NA SI MOTHER!

LOOKING after her "children," President Macapagal graces the 68th AFP anniversary on Friday. She's shown here with AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Narciso Abaya shortly before she goes on a pass and review at the parade grounds in Camp Aguinaldo.

VAL HANDUMON

VP hopefuls gird for free-for-all

By Michael Lim Ubac and Carlito Pablo

THE POLITICAL camps of prospective vice presidential candidates were as busy as Santa's workshop yesterday, with two floating trial balloons and one hinting at a long-awaited decision.

A key supporter of Sen. Robert Barbers of Lakas-CMD, who wants to be President Macapagal-Arroyo's running mate, claimed that Raul Roco's campaign group was making "overtures" to Barbers. Roco was "willing to take in" Barbers as his running mate, Isabela Rep. Rodolfo Albano said. *(See related story on Page A3.)*

Liberal Party president Rep. Florencio Abad (Batanes) said his party would likely support a presidential candidate who would pick its newest member, Senate President and now LP chair Franklin Drilon, to be the vice presidential candidate.

"We would like to join a presidential candidate who is interested

VP HOPEFULS/ A8

Stranded OFWs told to give up claims in Saudi

By Martin Marfil

THE 16 OVERSEAS Filipino workers stranded in Saudi Arabia who are asking the Philippine government to help in their repatriation may have to give up their claims against their employers if they wish to go home immediately.

The Department of Labor and Employment yesterday ruled out any immediate repatriation for the 16 because their pending cases in the oil-rich kingdom would be adversely affected if they left that country.

The workers have been holding a hunger strike at the Philippine Embassy in Riyadh to pressure the

STRANDED/ A18

Amnesty plan very dangerous, GMA warned

By Armand N. Nocum and Juliet Labog-Javellana

MISGIVINGS continued to be aired yesterday over President Macapagal-Arroyo's general amnesty plan, with civil society leaders expressing apprehension over her supposed closeness with Marcos cronies, including businessman Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco.

"Amnesty is very dangerous; it should be very calibrated. You may give the wrong message to wrongdoers," Teresita Baltazar of the civil society group Konsensyang Pilipino told the INQUIRER in a phone interview. Baltazar is also a government official, being a member of the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission.

She said the President owed her supporters and the Filipino people in general an explanation on how she intends to implement her plan to grant amnesty not only to Moro secessionists and communist insurgents but also to "those involved in past political conflicts.

"People will continue to do wrong, thinking that they can get away with it [because of the] amnesty offer from the government," Baltazar said. She said she was echoing the view of many civil society leaders who attended Thursday's executive committee meeting of the Konsensyang Pilipino, a network of about 80 nongovernment organizations that played an active role in ousting then President Joseph Estrada.

Among the groups represented at the meeting were the Concerned Women of the Philippines, Federation of Free Workers, Initiative of the Urban Poor, and Citizens' Action Against Crime.

Baltazar said that while Kon-

AMNESTY/ A17

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Visayas and Mindanao will have widespread rains while Palawan will be cloudy with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms. The rest of Luzon will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers.

SOURCE: PAGASA

COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/12/20/03

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	**Iloilo/Bacolod**	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	**Roxas**	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	**Cebu**	Widespread Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	**Tacloban**	Widespread Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	**Gen. Santos**	Widespread Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	**Zamboanga**	Widespread Rains
Legazpi	Partly Cloudy	**Cagayan de Oro**	Widespread Rains
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	**Davao**	Widespread Rains

E-mail: pr_news@inquirer.com.ph

Second FRONTPAGE

Public assured RP ready vs SARS

By Gil Cabacungan Jr. and Alcuin Papa

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday assured the public that the country was ready to deal with the resurgence in the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome amid fears of a new outbreak of the killer virus.

At the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, airport officials have intensified the screening of incoming passengers from Taiwan and Singapore after the Department of Health raised the SARS alert anew the other day.

"As far as potential resurgence of the SARS is concerned, we are on top of the situation," Ms Macapagal said in a statement. "The system is in place. We have never let our guard down."

The President said the country has "learned by experience" how to deal with the screening and containment of the SARS outbreak which reached global proportions early this year.

"Screening at international airports continues. The Department of Health has been strengthening health facilities for months and preparing SARS isolation rooms meeting international standards. The DOH has also pursued the training of its health workers to deal not just with SARS but all kinds of infectious diseases," the President said.

Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit issued a warning Thursday of a new SARS threat after the World Health Organization confirmed that a military scientist in Taiwan, who later travelled to Singapore, had tested positive for SARS.

Naia assistant general manager for security services Angel Atutubo told the INQUIRER yesterday that health personnel are focusing their screening on passengers from and bound for Taiwan and Singapore.

Atutubo said the Naia has not let down its guard against the deadly virus even after the SARS threat subsided in July.

In fact, quarantine officers from the DOH and the Naia have not left their posts since then and have continued screening incoming and outgoing passengers.

"Our watch on SARS has been continuous even after some countries were declared SARS-free. But this time, we are on heightened alert especially on passengers from the two countries," Atutubo said.

Atutubo said the three thermal cameras used to detect abnormally high body temperatures on passengers have been operational for the past few months.

Malacañang noted that the Philippines was the least affected among Asian countries by the SARS virus as it kept the number of victims to less than 20 and was stricken off the list of SARS-affected countries within weeks.

Meanwhile, Atutubo said that airport security has also been tightened to thwart terror threats due to the current peak season with thousands of passengers arriving and departing from the country.

Normally, some 42,000 passengers pass through the airport every day. But Atutubo said that due to the Christmas season, the number has reached around 70,000.

Atutubo said the airport's security force has been augmented by around 150 police personnel.

Some 1,500 PNP personnel, consisting of around 600 airport police and about 2,000 security guards are currently assigned at the Naia. Twelve K9 dogs assist the police to detect drugs and explosives.

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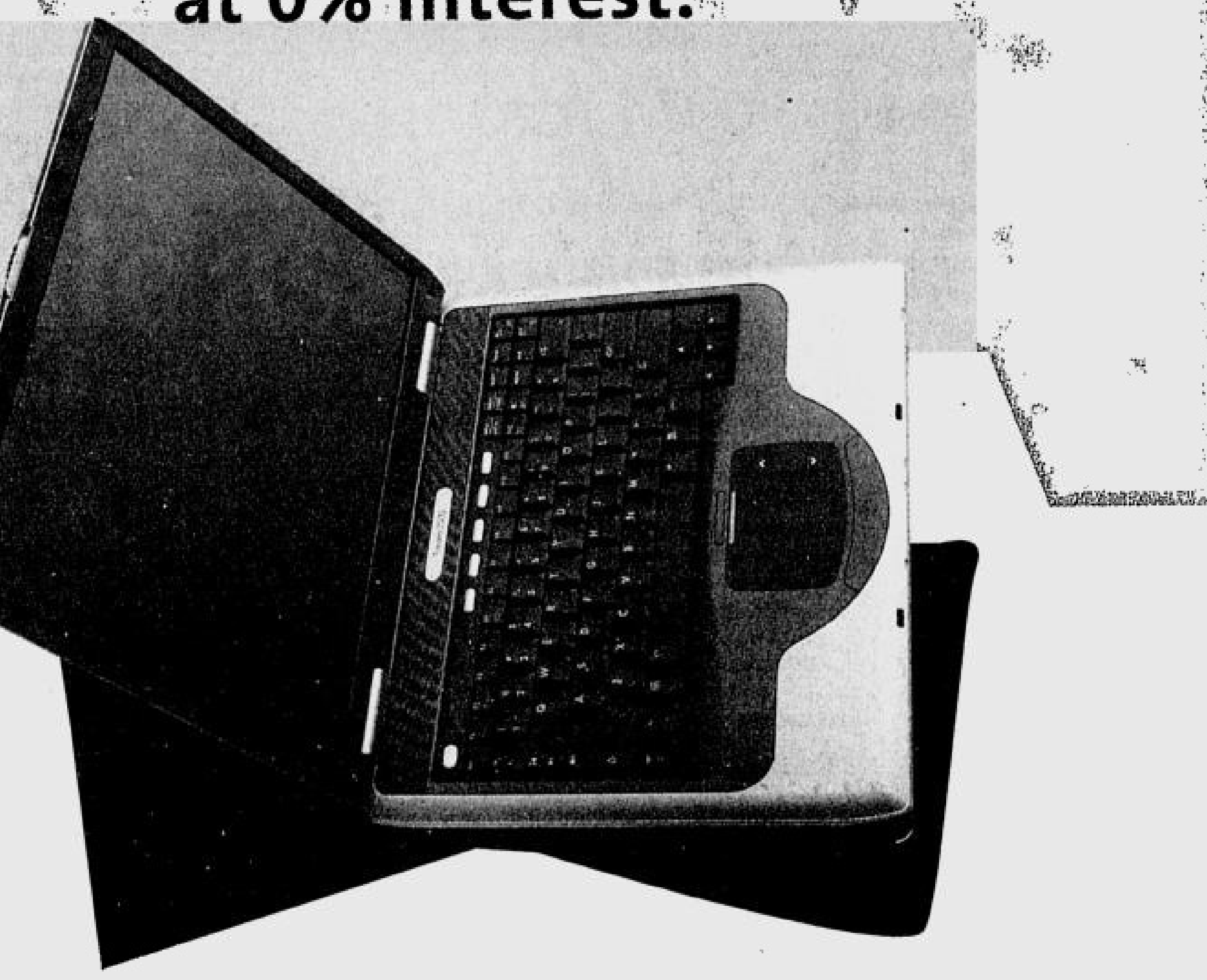

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Robbers hit two provincial banks

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—The police "chokepoints" in Metro Manila apparently are working. *(See related story in Metro, Page A18.)*

Authorities ordered tighter security around at least 51 banks in this capital city after a bank reported losing more than P2 million to robbers on Friday.

Senior Supt. Rodolfo Mendoza, Pampanga police chief, said the "acetylene gang" may have been behind the heist at the Rural Bank of Mabalacat in Barangay Sindalan here.

The same group was believed behind a number of bank robberies in Northern Luzon provinces, he said.

Investigators said the suspects gained access to the bank building on Thursday night or early Friday morning through a ventilation patch on the ceiling.

The vault's lock had been melted using an acetylene torch, possibly a portable one that looked like a fire extinguisher, police said.

Investigators said there were signs it was an inside job because the suspects appeared to be familiar with the alarm system which they cut off.

The bank did not have a security guard at night, said chief investigator SPO1 Rufino Macapagal.

The bank manager and a teller said more cash may have been taken because several safety deposit boxes were missing.

This was the first bank robbery in the city in at least five years, according to Supt. Nicanor Targa, city police director.

In Ifugao, armed men held up employees and security personnel of the Land Bank of the Philippines who were transporting at least P7 million in a company vehicle, reports from the Cordillera police office said.

The reports said four suspects blocked the bank's vehicle in Hingyon town just after 1 p.m. and at gunpoint took the money from the bank employees.

The money, according to police reports, was being taken to the LBP branch in Bontoc, Mt. Province. *Tonette Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Desk; PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

MILF rebels free 4 captured soldiers

COTABATO CITY—Saying the act proved the secessionist group respected international protocols covering prisoners of war, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front yesterday released the four soldiers its guerrillas had captured following a series of bloody clashes in Maguindanao.

"Our guerrillas never hurt them. They were taken care of," said Eid Kabalu, MILF spokesperson.

The soldiers, whom the MILF called POWs, were handed over to military and MILF peace negotiators at an undisclosed location in Datu Piang town, according to Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Julieto Ando.

Prior to the turnover, the MILF shot a video of the captives showing them having lunch in a hut in Barangay Gawang. The video was later shown over a local television station.

Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia, chair of the government's coordinating committee on the cessation of hostilities (CCCH), and his MILF counterpart Benjie Midtimbang took custody of Pfc. Alex Yumag and Privates Neil Lagad, Arnel Dibaudin and Wilfredo Castilliano, all of the Army's 7th Infantry Battalion, at around 4:30 p.m., according to Ando.

"They are well," Ando told the INQUIRER.

MILF fighters captured the four soldiers during intense fighting in Barangay Gawang in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town on Monday evening and Tuesday morning.

The soldiers were part of a larger force hunting the Pentagon kidnap gang, which has been holding hostage a 25-year-old Filipino-Chinese car dealer from this city.

Kabalu said that aside from turning over the four soldiers, the MILF allowed the military to retrieve the bodies of their dead. Kabalu said the military suffered at least 10 casualties.

But Ando said the military lost only six soldiers while 11 others were wounded in the clashes that ended after Garcia and Midtimbang agreed to a ceasefire on Tuesday.

The military said the manhunt against the Pentagon gang would continue.*Edwin O. Fernandez, Rosa-May V. de Guzman, Aquiles Z. Zonio, Allan A. Nawal and Anthony S. Allada, PDI Mindanao Bureau.*

GMA opens NLEX sections; toll road now 60% complete

SAN SIMON, Pampanga—President Macapagal-Arroyo inaugurated yesterday two completed segments of the North Luzon Expressway (NLEX), a vital link in Mega Manila's north-south infrastructure loop, that is expected to attract investments, create jobs and decongest traffic.

The President opened the Valenzuela City and San Simon, Pampanga, segments of the 84-km expressway. The two-year project to rehabilitate and modernize NLEX began in February last year after a seven-year delay due to policy, financial and legal problems and red tape.

Jose de Jesus, president of the Lopez-owned Manila North Tollways Corp., which is undertaking the $371-million toll road project, said NLEX is now 60 percent complete.

MNTC chair Oscar Lopez said the project will be completed in December 2004 or four months ahead of schedule.

"This will have a tremendous impact on Central and North Luzon. Development will follow," Lopez told the INQUIRER.

Built in the early 1970s, the NLEX starts from Balintawak in Quezon City and ends in Sta. Inez in Mabalacat, Pampanga.

"We need to produce the infrastructures that will spur the investments to create the jobs and defeat poverty," Ms Macapagal said during the launch.

She said the toll road project will give investors more options on where to locate their businesses and residences as travel time is reduced. Improved infrastructures also increase productivity, she said. *Tonette Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

FPJ to announce 'co-star' next week, says Angara

MOVIE actor Fernando Poe Jr. will announce his choice of a running mate next week, or before he files his certificate of candidacy for president on Dec. 29, Sen. Edgardo Angara said yesterday.

"I cannot tell you the exact date but I'm positive that within a week the team will be announced," Angara told reporters at a news conference.

He said Poe will make the announcement, noting that the popular actor himself would make the choice of his running mate.

"It's Mr. Poe's choice and the only participation of the political parties would be to suggest names to him but the final choice would be his," said Angara.

The newly formed opposition Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP) led by Angara has proclaimed Poe as its standard-bearer for the May 2004 elections but the latter has yet to formally accept the offer.

Among those who have made themselves available to be Poe's running mate are Senators Loren Legarda, Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan and Aquilino Pimentel Jr., and former Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago.

At the same news conference, Angara described Sen. Panfilo Lacson, who is contesting the opposition's nomination with Poe, as a "desperate" man for alleging that he (Angara) was a "mole" of Malacañang.

Lacson had said that Angara, president of the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino, was really a Palace insider who intended to bring chaos to the opposition and divide it.

"If I were indeed working for Malacañang, would it not be logical [for me to support] the candidate who has the poorest showing in the surveys, so that [President Macapagal] would surely beat him?" Angara said. *Christine O. Avendaño*

Clear Air Act on track–Perez

By Abigail L. Ho

NO, Filipinos do not have to wait another five years to have a taste of cleaner air.

Energy Secretary Vincent Perez yesterday said there were no plans to defer the implementation of the Clean Air Act (CAA), particularly the provision on lower sulfur content in automotive diesel fuel.

He said the Department of Energy had, in fact, been pushing for the CAA's strict implementation by calling for the possible application of uniform standards of low sulfur content for both automotive and industrial diesel fuel.

The CAA requires oil firms to reduce the sulfur content of automotive diesel by 75 percent from 0.2 percent to 0.05 percent effective Jan. 1, 2004.

For industrial diesel fuel used by power plants, shipping lines and fishing fleets, however, the CAA did not specify a date for compliance by fuel providers.

"The implementation of the CAA with regard to the fuel specifications has been in full swing and in fact most of the target deadlines were even accelerated to underscore the government's fight for a cleaner air," he said in a statement yesterday.

He said CAA compliance for automotive diesel fuel was even accelerated to November this year in Metro Manila.

For industrial fuel, the CAA did not give a specific deadline as, Perez said, the 1999 law recognized that compliance with emission standards for stationary sources could only be achieved through appropriate configuration of the fuel users' respective facilities, machines and equipment.

But still, the CAA mandated the energy department to constantly review fuel standards so that air quality could improve.

With the law imposing a Jan. 1, 2004 deadline on compliance with the mandated sulfur content for automotive diesel fuel, some sectors likewise sought the adoption of a similar provision for industrial diesel.

"Several consultations were held to hear the positions of different sectors whether or not to impose uniform standards for automotive and industrial fuel. The government believes that access to a cleaner air is one of the basic rights but it should be a shared responsibility," Perez said.

He noted that such a move could result in oil price hikes.

Following the consultations, the DOE, through the Technical Committee on Petroleum and Additives, would be proposing to the Bureau of Products Standards new specifications for industrial diesel.

From the current 0.2 percent sulfur content, industrial diesel should only have 0.05 percent of sulfur effective Jan. 1, 2009.

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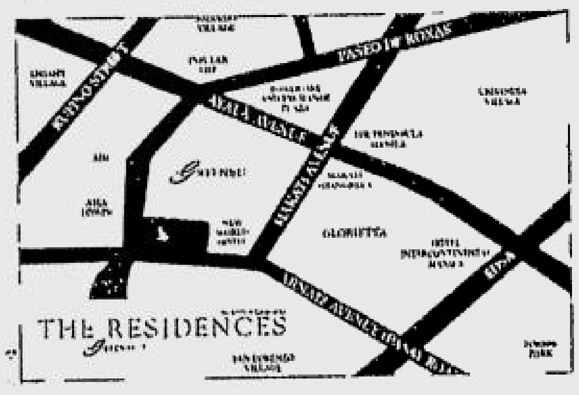

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Germans to stay Robot extradition bid if he goes on trial in RP

GOETTINGEN, Germany—Germany said on Thursday it would be flexible over the extradition of the leader of an extremist group implicated in bombings and abductions in the Philippines, some involving German tourists.

A spokesperson for the prosecutor's office in the central city of Goettingen said extradition procedures against Abu Sayyaf leader Galib Andang would not begin if he went on trial at home.

"In that case we would shelve the affair and we would no longer request extradition," the spokesperson said.

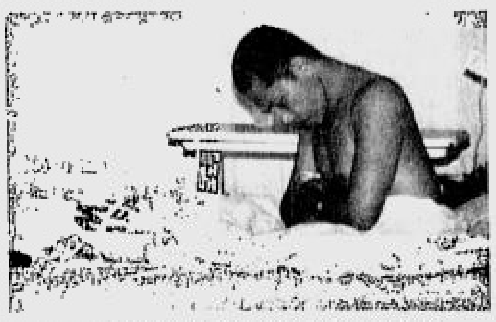
Andang, otherwise known as Commander Robot, was captured in Jolo earlier this month more than three years after allegedly leading a raid in Malaysia to take 21 people hostage, including a German family of three from Goettingen.

The group has been blamed for numerous kidnappings and bombings against Christian and foreign targets in this overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country throughout the last decade.

Earlier, President Macapagal-Arroyo said the Philippines would allow German prosecutors to interrogate Andang, but added that any talk of extradition was "premature". "Commander Robot may be facing charges in Germany but he will face the music in the Philippines first," Ms Macapagal said in a statement.

"We assure the German government that Commander Robot will be secured and available for questioning by their probers, but talk about his extradition is premature.

"He will have to be prosecuted and tried by a Philippine court for the crimes he committed against our people," she added. "Philippine justice is ascendant and will be promulgated." Andang had a leg amputated after suffering gunshot wounds during his capture by the Philippine Army on Dec. 7. His arrest is thought to have delivered a considerable body blow to Abu Sayyaf. *AFP*



COMMANDER Robot ponders his future minus his left leg at a military hospital in Quezon City. ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES PHOTO

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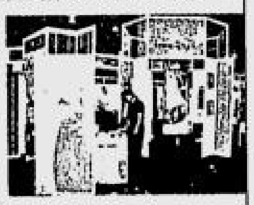
This year, an international e-Services conference will take place concurrent to the exhibit, and will feature international experts and practitioners in e-Services. They will evaluate what's happened so far, where these sectors are going from here, and what needs to be done to maintain the synergy.

International delegates will attend e-Services Philippines 2004 because it is the most efficient, effective way to meet and network with e-Services sector leaders. To many of these visitors, if a company isn't visible at e-Services Philippines, it's not a player. If your organization is leveraging these fast-growing sectors and you intend to be a player, then you should make reservations how to participate in e-Services Philippines 2004, and showcase what you have to offer the world's leading contractors and purchasers of e-Services.



Reservations are already being accepted, and selection of exhibit space is on a first-come, first-served basis. To get the space you want, complete and fax in your reservation form today.

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Suspected communist rebels bomb Globe cell site in Cavite

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna—Seven armed men bombed and strafed the Globe Telecom cell site in Carmona, Cavite Thursday night, disrupting mobile phone service in that province and Batangas.

Cavite police director Chief Supt. Roberto Rosales said the gunmen, who identified themselves as members of the communist New People's Army (NPA), overpowered security guard Ronaldo Cabellon at around 11 p.m. before detonating several homemade bombs and shooting up telecommunications equipment.

Cabellon told police the suspects were furious over Globe's refusal to pay "revolutionary taxes" to the NPA.

Globe officials, however, told police the cell site's operations were not entirely hampered. They refused to reveal the extent of the damage to the property.

Rosales said investigators found empty shells for M-14 rifles and traces of gasoline and ammonium nitrate from the improvised bombs.

He said he did not believe the gunmen were NPA rebels, noting that there had never been reports of a guerrilla presence in the area.

"The NPA has never established operations in Carmona. They also never use M-14 rifles in their operations. They use M-16s and pistols," Rosales told the INQUIRER.

Rosales, former police director of NPA-infested Quezon province, said authorities were looking at the possibility residents of nearby barangays were responsible for the attack.

He said ACO Construction Corp., the contractor that built the cell site, drew the ire of the residents after it failed to fulfill its promise of hiring them in the construction of the site.

Rosales said police had recorded an incident where local residents stoned ACO employees and fired at its engineers after failing to get jobs. *Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Designate firecracker zones—Lina

INTERIOR Secretary Jose Lina Jr. yesterday asked local government executives to designate a firecracker and pyrotechnic zone where revelers could safely explode firecrackers on Christmas and New Year's eves.

Lina said the establishment of so-called "firecracker and pyrotechnic zones" in every province, city, municipality and barangay could go a long way in making the New Year's festivities safer for the people.

He urged local government executives to convene their peace and order councils and draw up their public safety plans for the holidays.

Lina also said that the public should do its part in the campaign.

"The public should not buy the banned items (explosive devices) that illegally made their way into the market," Lina said. *Nelson F. Flores*

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RP sailor killed in oil tanker blast in Portugal; 9 others hurt

LISBON—A Filipino sailor was killed and nine others were injured on Thursday after an explosion ripped through part of an oil tanker under repair at a port in Portugal, emergency workers said.

Three of the injured were in serious condition at a hospital following the blast in the vessel, which was docked at a shipping repair yard in Setubal, 50 kilometers south of Lisbon.

Firefighters did not identify the Filipino victim, a crew member of the Portuguese tanker.

It was not immediately clear what caused the explosion.

A member of the worker's commission at Lisnave, the partly state-owned ship repair yard where the accident occurred, said employees were carrying out welding work inside the ship just before the explosion.

"Some workers were adding metal coverings to the inside of the hull of the vessel in the morning, there was a safety inspection and everything was normal," said Fernando Parreira.

Lisnave said it will investigate the cause of the explosion.

AFP

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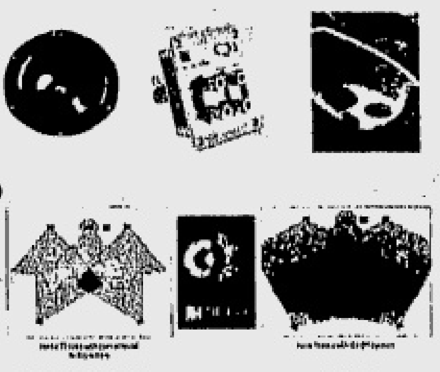

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It is one of the trades that are undisputedly Kapampangan. Lantern-making first began in the town of San Fernando during the early part of this century. What distinguish the San Fernando lantern from the ordinary parol are the intricate designs and the illusion of dancing lights, which highlight the vibrant colors of the lantern.

The Christmas lantern can never be distanced from the town which created it, the City of San Fernando. It is what San Fernando is known for. And it is what has made the city famous all over the country and even around the world. Such a creation however, did not come without the untiring efforts of San Fernando's citizens, and more so, their creativity and innovation. And it is because of the Christmas lantern that San Fernando has earned for itself the title of "Christmas Capital of the Philippines." And to truly appreciate the colorful and intricate display of ights, one must understand its deep history and the strong traditions involved in the creation of the San Fernando Giant Lantern.

HON. REY B. AQUINO, M.D.
City Mayor

Calendar of Activities

Ligligan Parul – Giant Lantern Festival 2003
December 20, 7:00 p.m. at the Amphitheater, SM City Pampanga

1st Annual City of San Fernando Christmas Marathon
December 20, 5:30 a.m. in front of the City Hall of San Fernando

The Ultimate Giant Lantern Street Party
December 30, 7:00 p.m. along MacArthur Highway, Dolores

Giant Lantern Exhibition at WOW Northern Philippines Hilaga Village on December 21 and 22, Barangay Sindalan on December 23, in front of the City Hall of San Fernando on December 24 and 31, at the Alda ning Siyudad San Fernando on December 28 at WOW Philippines, Intramuros, and at the SM Supermalls on December 29 (SM Megamall) and December 30 (SM City North EDSA)

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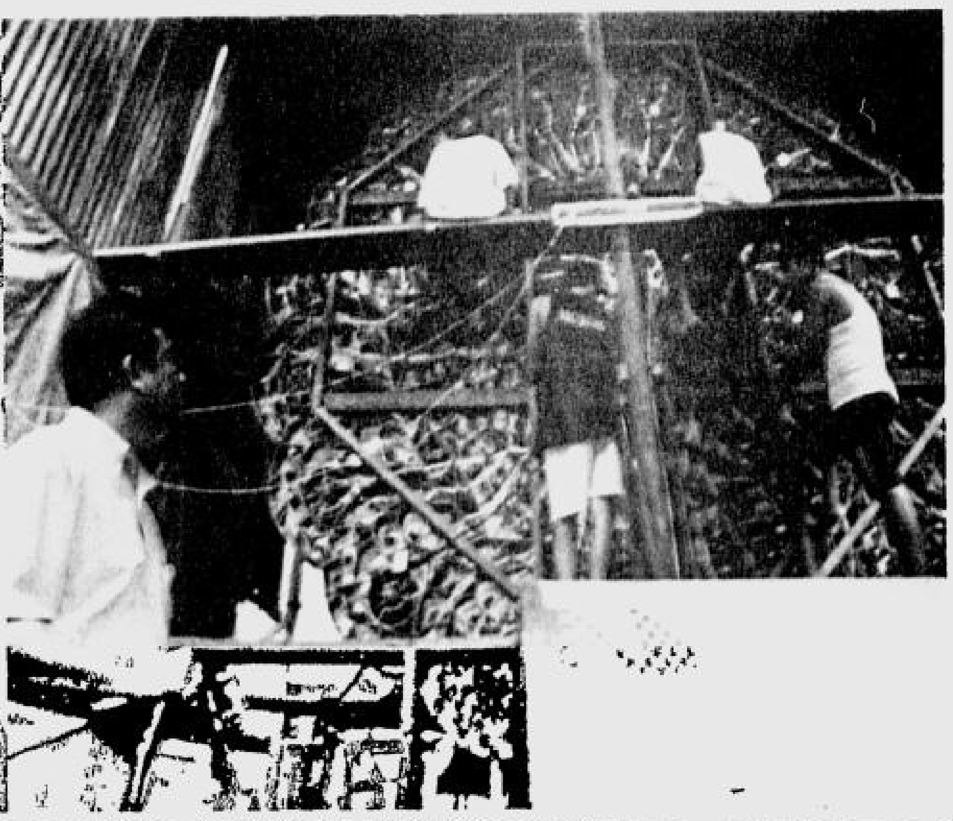

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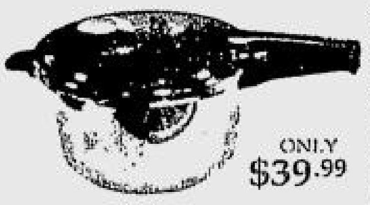
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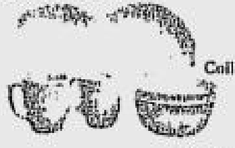
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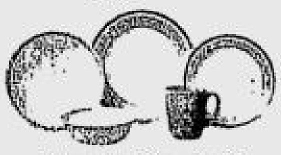
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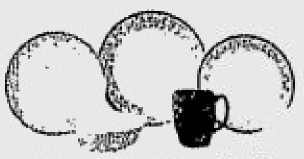
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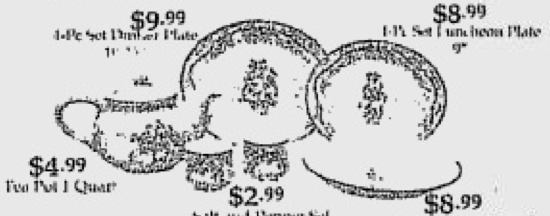
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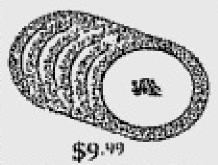
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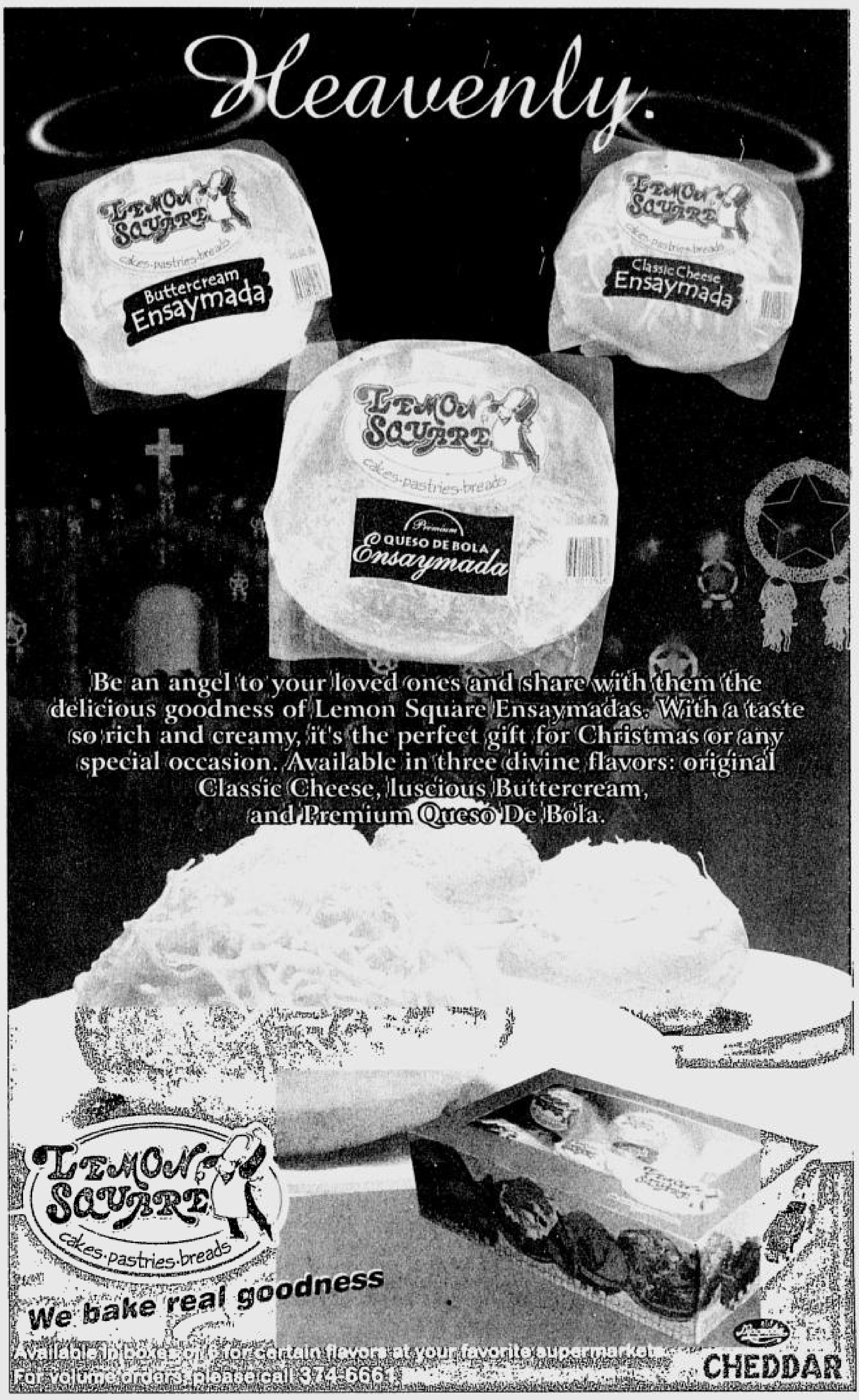
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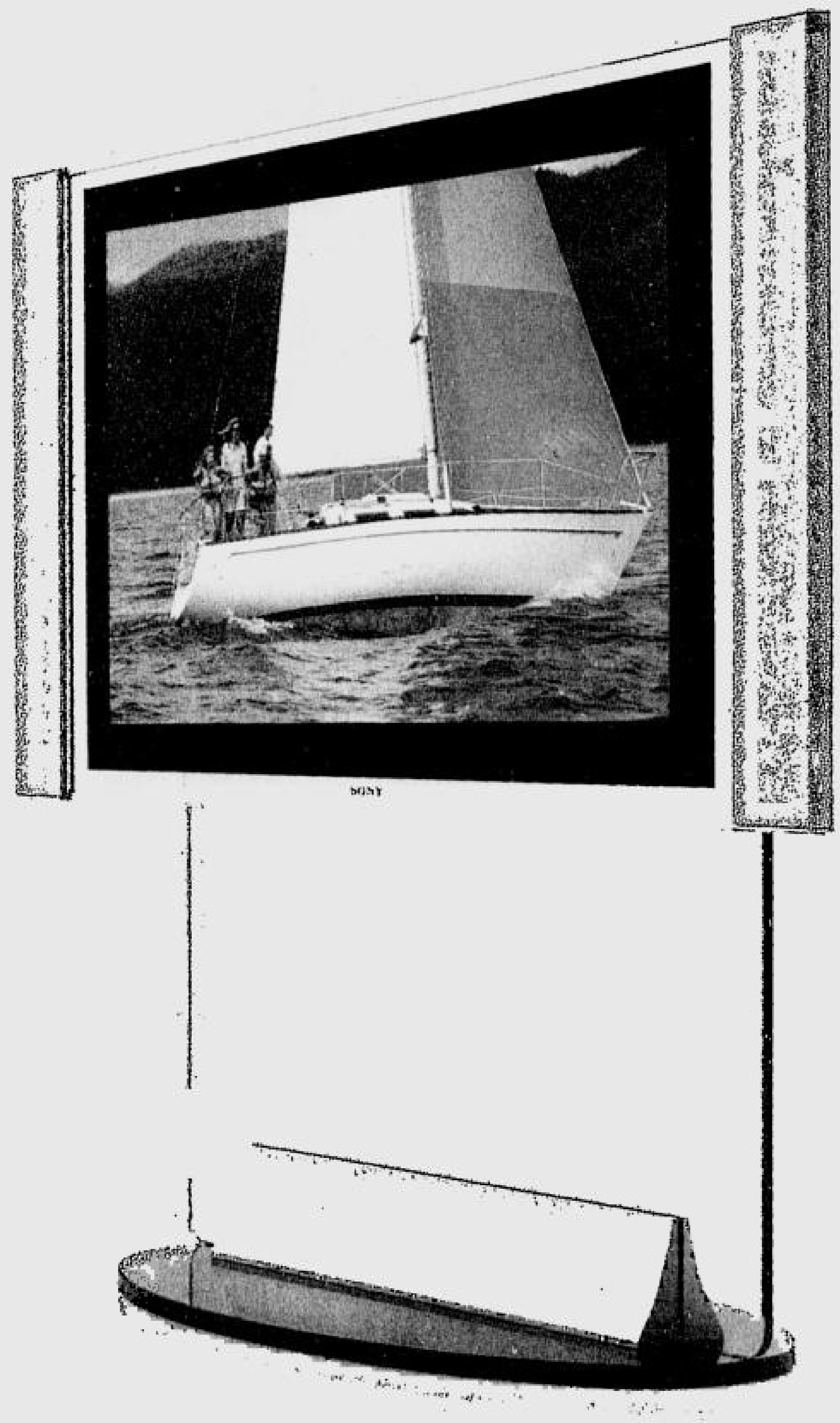

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Alliance means Danding's for GMA–son

From page A1

Wednesday, allying with the ruling party to support the President's bid and to forge a common senatorial ticket.

Asked if the alliance was a sign that the Cojuangcos would support Ms Macapagal in May, Negros Occidental Rep. Carlos "Charlie" Cojuangco said it could be read as "a sign of support."

"Yeah, you could say it is an indication," he told the INQUIRER. He refused to elaborate, however.

His father, the chair of the government-sequestered San Miguel Corp., had long been rumored to be the principal backer of movie actor Fernando Poe Jr.'s candidacy. The SMC executive declared he had finally decided not to run for president only on the eve of Poe's launching of his own candidacy.

2nd biggest bloc

There are 54 NPC congressmen, forming the second largest bloc in the 12th Congress, and a total of 20 NPC governors.

But the younger Cojuangco (his brother Mark is a congressmen from Pangasinan) said the alliance was not a decision of the party as a whole, but the result of individual decisions by the party members.

Both groups also agreed to support the "Sunshine Coalition" of the Lakas-CMD and NPC, which advocates Charter change.

Among the constitutional provisions they want changed are the shift from the presidential to the parliamentary form of government, the establishment of a unicameral legislature and the holding of elections every five years.

The younger Cojuangco, who is running for reelection under the NPC, was not present in Malacañang during the signing of the covenant.

On Thursday, he filed his certificate of candidacy for his third term as congressman of the fourth district of Negros Occidental before Provincial Elections Officer Marsha Cordero in Bacolod City.

With Rio Diaz

He said he decided to stay in the province to finish his work before he would leave on Sunday to spend Christmas with his family in Australia.

Accompanying him during the filing were his wife, television host Rio Diaz-Cojuangco, and their children, Claudia, 8 and Jaime, 6.

Cojuangco said he wanted to spend Christmas with his entire family in Australia because "my wife is in relatively good health (and) I don't want to miss this opportunity with our kids."

Rio is suffering from cancer. When asked how she was doing, she replied: "I'm still in chemo(therapy) but I'm doing very well. By the grace of God I live moment by moment."

She said it was with pride and joy that she could be with her husband when he filed his CoC.

"I know my husband can do very well for the fourth district," she said.

Cojuangco said he is seeking another term because he has a lot of projects for the fourth district that he wants to finish.

"I would like another three years to finish my work for the fourth district. I still feel in all sincerity that in the fourth district of Negros Occidental I'm still the most qualified representative," he said.

GMA uses hard sell …

From page A1

her top priorities.

"I care about our family in the [AFP]," she declared. "And that's why I care about your morale; I care about your comfort; I care about your health; I care about your ability to cope with the demands of life."

The President went on to cite the government's P1-billion housing package for the 113,000-strong military, including ongoing housing projects in the provinces of Cavite and Bulacan, in Parañaque City and in Fort Bonifacio, Makati City.

"Military housing has been one of my priorities," she said, addressing a motley crowd of active and retired officials, foreign military attachés, and Cabinet and other officials including Sen. Rodolfo Biazon and Speaker Jose de Venecia.

She also said she had directed Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita and AFP chief Gen. Narciso Abaya to post a military doctor in regional government hospitals near areas of conflict to "immediately" attend to wounded soldiers.

Campaign pitch

And then "the mother" reminded her "children" never to overlook her efforts at raising their salary to the level of public school teachers' pay, and thanked Congress for the speedy passage of the standardization law.

The standardization was implemented in three tranches, starting in January last year and culminating in January next year.

"I also take this opportunity to urge Congress to expedite legislation for the increase in combat pay, and subsistence and quarters' allowance," she added, eliciting applause from her audience.

An enlisted man, who asked not to be named, said Ms Macapagal's statements were a virtual campaign pitch to the soldiers.

"She might have had other things in mind when she said that," the soldier said in an interview. "But to us, it only meant one thing: She's campaigning. She has already made her intention to run for President known."

Praise

Dressed in a silk blouse, Ms Macapagal took the occasion to praise the troops for, among others, their "professionalism in upholding peace, especially peace in Mindanao."

"Despite recent losses, you have held fire and allowed the ceasefire mechanism to work," she said, adding:

"I salute you for your disciplined adherence for the welfare of the people."

She also hailed the military for its renewed campaign against terrorism that resulted in the capture of Abu Sayyaf leader Galib Andang alias Commander Robot on Dec. 7 and of Jemaah Islamiyah leader Taufek Refke on Oct. 12.

She cited intelligence officer Lt. Col. Aminkandra Undug, who drew up the plan to capture Andang, and Col. Alexander Yapching, whose troops at the Army's 104th Brigade provided support for the team that captured the bandit leader.

Undug, one of the awardees in yesterday's rites, received the outstanding achievement medal from Ms Macapagal.

Refke, alleged logistics and liaison officer of the Jemaah Islamiyah in the country, was captured in Cotabato City. His capture came 10 days after authorities shot and killed the fugitive bomb expert Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi.

Fusion

The President likewise commended the military for its "inter-operational fusion" with the Philippine National Police in the government's fresh drive to root out kidnapping and other heinous crimes, which resulted in the neutralization of top kidnap leaders.

"You have not only gifted the country with the capture of Robot. The slaying of [kidnap-for-ransom] leader Dr. Roberto Obeles Yap and his gang and the capture of the No. 4, 5 and 7 top kidnappers are [also] the starters in your institutionalized fusion," she said.

In response, Abaya expressed gratitude to Ms Macapagal for pushing for the salary standardization law and authorizing the release of P30 million in housing assistance for the families of soldiers killed in action.

"We acknowledge the President's support toward this end," he said, noting that it was aimed at boosting troop morale.

Abaya promised to continue laying the ground for the President's vision of a "strong republic."

"Notwithstanding the taxing incidences of insurgency, secessionism and terrorism, the AFP has been consistently and effectively helping in maintaining government control and in providing a dependable anchor upon which our nation, our institutions and our people can realize that shared vision," he said.

Ceasefire

At least four soldiers were killed Monday after they were attacked by members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front while tracking down Pentagon gang members in Datu Piang, Maguindanao.

The effort to rescue a kidnap victim triggered a clash.

The coordinating committee on the cessation of hostilities rushed to declare a ceasefire agreement on Tuesday night to avert an escalation of conflict that could derail the planned resumption of peace negotiations early next year.

Part of this agreement was the release of four captured soldiers by the MILF and the withdrawal of rebels from Datu Piang late Thursday afternoon, to pave the way for continued operations against the kidnap gang.

"The tension has been defused and both sides agreed there will be no movement of forces. And I'm sure that later, maybe about January, the committees will start talking," Abaya said in an ambush interview.

The AFP chief also noted that rebel commanders and their men moved out of their positions to a "temporary area" in Datu Piang at the same time that the four captured soldiers were released by the MILF.

SGV chief is new trade secretary

From page A1

seat in next year's elections.

Presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said Purisima, 43, was chosen because of his professional competency, integrity and support for the President's development agenda.

The President's decision ended weeks of speculation that the head of the country's biggest accounting and consultancy firm would be appointed to one of the major Cabinet posts.

Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chamber of Commerce executive vice president Francis Chua said: "While some consider Cesar as representing only the interests of big business, we should give him a chance to prove that he can serve the interest of all Filipinos not just a particular sector."

Also a bachelor

Like his predecessor Roxas, 46, Purisima is also still a bachelor.

Purisima, who joined SGV as a junior auditor in 1980 and assumed the chairmanship of the accounting firm in July 1999, is well known in business circles as he has taken an active role in the discussions and implementation of policy and reforms.

He will be the second SGV chair to join Ms Macapagal's Cabinet.

In February 2002, the President appointed former SGV chair Gloria Tan-Climaco as Presidential Adviser on Strategic Projects with a Cabinet rank. Climaco resigned from her post in December 2002.

Currently, Purisima is chair of the Philippines-France Business Council and co-chair of the Philippines-Thailand Business Council. He is also a member of the Philippines-Japan Economic Cooperation Committee, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Philippine Institute of Certified Public Accountants (Picpa), the Rotary Club of Manila and the Management Association of the Philippines where he has served as a member of the Board of Governors and Assistant Treasurer.

CPA top placer

Purisima was among the top placers in the Certified Public Accountants board examinations in 1979.

From a junior SGV auditor, Purisima was elevated to the partnership in 1989. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in commerce from De La Salle University and earned his MBA from the J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management of Northwestern University.

In 1994, Purisima received the Picpa Young Achievers' Award. He was named Outstanding CPA in Public Practice in 1997. The Republic of France conferred on Purisima in 2001 the Order of Merit with the rank of knight.

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VP hopefuls gird for free-for-all

From page A1

in getting Frank Drilon," Abad said.

In the Senate, during a Christmas party for reporters, Senate Majority Leader Loren Legarda virtually confirmed what has long been an open secret: a Fernando Poe Jr.-Legarda tandem in 2004.

Asked if she would become FPJ's running mate, she said: "*Mamaya na Poe. Maligayang pasko* Poe."

Despite her coy stance, Legarda is definitely joining the opposition camp to team-up with the movie king.

Legarda said she would be announcing her vice presidential candidacy ahead of Poe's filing of his certificate of candidacy on December 29.

"I have almost decided on my running-mate, but I will leave it to your creative imagination and speculation to think who that person is," said Legarda, drawing chuckles from reporters.

Repeating her well-worn signature answer, Legarda said: "I will make my official declaration soon and will file shortly thereafter."

But definitely, she said, the announcement would be "within the Christmas season."

Impatient

Albano disclosed the Roco camp's reported courting of Barbers as he urged President Macapagal to make an immediate announcement about her choice for vice president.

He said a number of Lakas leaders are getting impatient with the "dawdling position" of the Palace.

"I dread the day when some members of the party will bolt out of the party including Senator Barbers because of this tarrying game," Albano said.

Barbers, a staunch defender of Ms Macapagal's, has been endorsed by the Lakas national directorate in its meeting last October.

Lakas president and Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. earlier said that Barbers can bring a "geographical balance" to Ms Macapagal's reelection bid, being a popular lawmaker from Mindanao.

Between De Castro, Barbers

The Palace is said to be choosing between Barbers and popular broadcaster Sen. Noli de Castro.

Albano said the delay in the President's announcement was "causing anxiety among the supporters of Sen. Barbers that may result in false hopes."

Albano noted that the Roco camp will get Barbers "in case he (Barbers) fails to get the nod of GMA as her running mate."

Reflecting the sentiments of other Lakas leaders, Albano said that some party stalwarts "might make an early commitment to support other candidates since there is no clear-cut stand by the ruling party on whom to support in the coming elections."

"The long wait might create dissension within the ranks and trigger an exodus to other parties," Albano said.

Major consideration

In a phone interview, Abad said the LP naturally wanted to align with a candidate who would choose Drilon: "That's one of the major considerations but not the ultimate determinant."

"There are other factors to consider, like position on issues and winnability," Abad said.

Drilon's candidacy is "part of the discussions" about which candidate the LP will support for president in 2004.

At the moment, Speaker Jose De Venecia of Lakas is working on a draft covenant that 22 of the 23 LP congressmen may sign, declaring their support for Ms. Macapagal.

Lakas has given up on Rep. Edgar Erice (LP, Caloocan) who is running for mayor of Caloocan against Gigi Malonzo, wife of incumbent Mayor Reynaldo Malonzo.

The Lakas-LP covenant is seen as a major follow-through to the recently inked pact between Lakas and more than 40 leaders of the Nationalist People's Coalition of businessman Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.

Abad noted that the LP has sufficient time to decide which camp to support as the period of the filing of certificates of candidacies will end in two weeks.

"We would like to see the line-up of other parties," Abad said.

Abad said the LP has only one national candidate so far: resigned Trade Secretary Manuel "Mar" Roxas who is running for senator.

LP stalwart Michael Defensor, who is the housing chief of the Macapagal administration, is the campaign spokesperson of Ms Macapagal.

The LP is said to be torn down the middle between the President and Roco.

Senate party

The reporters' party hosted by Drilon and Senators Legarda, Ramon Magsaysay and Robert Jaworski gave the senators an opportunity to poke fun at one another.

Toward the end of the party, the reporters asked them to hold a press conference one after the other.

Malonzo endorses Gordon for VP

CALOOCAN City Mayor Rey Malonzo yesterday voiced support for Tourism Secretary Richard J. Gordon to run for vice president in the coming national elections, saying Gordon is "the only person who possesses the vision, capability, qualification, track record, integrity, and commitment to service that are required in a vice president."

In an appeal, Malonzo urged Gordon to run for the country's No. 2 post, and urged President Macapagal-Arroyo to select Gordon as her running mate.

In his letter, Malonzo says "Mr. Secretary, we urge you to run for vice president of the Republic of the Philippines. You must give Filipinos a better choice—the best choice, so that we may move toward a better future for our children."

The mayor also asked Ms Macapagal "to choose Gordon to be your running mate in the coming election. His loyalty to your administration and to the Filipino people is beyond question, and he can provide the continuity that this country so desperately needs."

To support his appeal, Malonzo cites Gordon's experience and impeccable track record as an executive, particularly his transformation of Olongapo from a "Sin City" to a "Model City." Gordon is well known for instituting such successful programs as the transport color-coding scheme, integrated garbage collection system, and People's Law Enforcement Board (PLEB), which protects people from erring and abusive policemen.

The WORLD

Editor Luverne B. Gueco

Courts deal blows to Bush war on terror

WASHINGTON—US courts on Thursday dealt a double blow to US President George W. Bush's prosecution of the war on terror, with rulings that his administration was abusing the rights of detainees.

One court said inmates at the US detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, should be allowed access to lawyers and the court system. A second ruled that an American, Jose Padilla, suspected of involvement in an al-Qaida plot, could not be held as an enemy combatant.

In San Francisco, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals made a 2-1 decision harshly critical of the detention of the 660 prisoners at Guantanamo without charge or the protection of the Geneva Convention.

Most were captured in Afghanistan when the United States toppled the Taliban regime and routed the al-Qaida network responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001.

"Even in times of national emergency... it is the obligation of the judicial branch to ensure the preservation of our constitutional values and to prevent the executive branch from running roughshod over the rights of citizens and aliens alike," the court said.

The ruling was issued in a case filed by Belaid Gherebi on behalf of his brother, Faren, a Libyan who is being held at Guantanamo.

The court said it could not accept that the US administration possessed the "unchecked authority" to detain anyone under US jurisdiction and control "without permitting such prisoners recourse of any kind to any judicial forum, or even access to counsel."

Such a position was "so extreme" that it raised the "gravest concerns" under both US and international law.

The court's findings are unlikely to have any short-term impact, as the US Supreme Court is expected to rule on the whole issue of the Guantanamo detainees next year.

Prior to Thursday's decision, US authorities had taken a small step by naming a military defense counsel for one of six detainees at Guantanamo who has been singled out by Bush for possible trial by a military commission.

The other bad news for the government came when a federal appeals court in New York ruled that Bush did not have the right to detain an American citizen seized on US soil, as an "enemy combatant" and ordered his release within 30 days.

Jose Padilla—suspected of plotting with al-Qaida a radioactive bomb attack on US soil—has been held without charge at a Naval brig in South Carolina since June last year.

"Presidential authority does not exist in a vacuum," the court said in another 2-1 majority decision that stressed Bush would require specific Congressional authorization to detain Padilla in such a fashion.

"The president's inherent constitutional powers do not extend to the detention as an enemy combatant of an American citizen seized within the country away from a zone of combat," it said.

The White House described the ruling as "troubling and flawed," while the Justice Department said it would seek a stay and appeal the decision.

"In times of war, the president must have the authority to act when an individual associated with our nation's enemies enters our country to endanger American lives," said department spokesperson Mark Corallo. *AFP*

CHRISTMAS TRUCE

A handout picture shows German and British troops meeting in no-man's land during the Christmas Truce of 1914. The first German book on the legendary event is based on accounts from soldiers on both sides who staged impromptu armistices along most of the western front of World War One, playing football, swapping food and burying their dead together. REUTERS

WORLDBRIEFS

Blast in Iraq Shiite office

BAGHDAD—At least one person was killed Friday when a blast ripped through a religious school affiliated to Iraq's main Shiite political party in Baghdad, a day after a senior US officer warned that insurgent attacks against Iraqi targets were on the rise. About 10 other people were wounded in the explosion targeting the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, residents said, attributing the blast to a bomb. One woman died in the blast in western Baghdad, said the victim's nephew, Ahmad Rahim. There was no official confirmation. *AFP*

7 cleared of SARS in HK

HONG KONG—Seven elderly patients from a Hong Kong hospital have been cleared of SARS, but health officials are still monitoring a man who travelled on the same plane as a Taiwan researcher who came down with the respiratory virus, officials said Friday. A Department of Health spokesperson said tests on the patients from the Alice Nethersole hospital in the New Territories, who had been placed in isolation, were found to be "negative and showed they don't have SARS." Authorities placed Hong Kong on a Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome alert Wednesday after a laboratory researcher in Taiwan was confirmed as having come down with the respiratory virus. *AFP*

Snoring linked to heart failure

MELBOURNE, Australia—People who snore are more likely to suffer heart failure, Australian researchers said Friday. Doctors at the Alfred hospital's Sleep Disorders Center in Melbourne uncovered the link while carrying out a study into sleep apnoea, in which people temporarily stop breathing while they are asleep. The study involving 40 patients found wearing masks that pump air into the nose to prevent snoring significantly reduced the risk of congestive heart failure. Chief investigator associate professor Matthew Naughton said snoring could be as serious as smoking or diabetes in causing heart disease. "For sometime now we've recognized that people who snore commonly have heart disease and what we've shown is that if you treat the snoring, the heart disease improves," Naughton said. "Not only you are at higher risk of heart disease but being tired all the time means you're at higher risk of vehicle or workplace accidents." He said the findings could change the way people viewed snoring. "I don't think snoring should be disregarded as a nuisance," Naughton said. *AFP*

Afghan women seek equal rights

KABUL—Women at a convention on Afghanistan's constitution have called for the document to enshrine equal rights as the assembly was set Friday to discuss divisive issues such as the power of the president. Article 22 of the draft document says the "citizens of Afghanistan have equal rights and duties before the law," but does not explicitly state that women have equal rights. Under the harsh rule of the Taliban regime ousted two years ago, women and girls were denied education and effectively barred from public life. Article 22 should be changed to: "Afghan men and women have equal rights and duties before the law," Nadira, a woman delegate from northern Balkh province, said Thursday. *AFP*

Israel threatens unilateral steps

HERZLIYA, Israel—Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon gave notice to the Palestinians Thursday that he would abandon attempts to reach a peace deal and implement his own unilateral measures if they did not meet their commitments to the Middle East roadmap within months. "We wish to speedily advance implementation of the roadmap toward a quiet and genuine peace," Sharon said in a keynote speech here. "We hope that the Palestinian Authority will carry out its part. However if in a few months the Palestinians still continue to disregard their part in implementing the roadmap then Israel will initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians. *AFP*

Japan to adopt US missile defense

TOKYO—Japan said Friday it had decided to adopt ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems to protect itself from emerging threats of terrorists, weapons of mass destruction and North Korean missiles. Japan will introduce a US-developed system for now and continue to conduct joint research with the United States to improve on the system, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda said in a statement. "BMD meets (Japan's) exclusively defense-oriented policy as the only effective method to counter attacks by ballistic missiles," he said. "It is a purely defensive system and should not threaten our neighbors," he said. *AFP*

Bremer convoy escaped attack

BAGHDAD—The top US civil administrator in Iraq, Paul Bremer, said Friday he had survived an attack against him, but an aide said he did not seem to have been specifically targeted.

"That's correct," Bremer told reporters in the southern city of Basra when asked whether there had been an attack against him earlier in December.

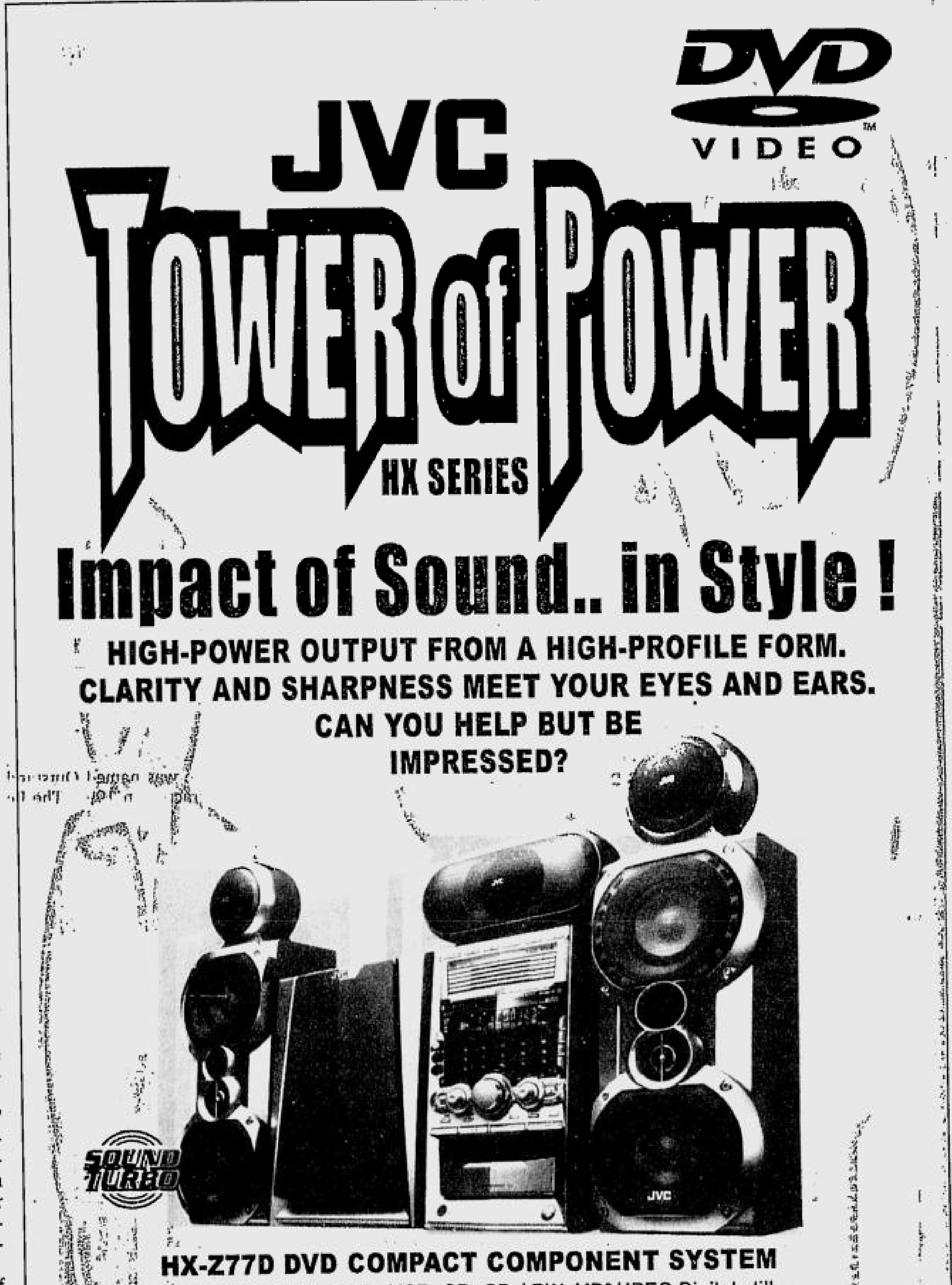
Bremer laughed off the incident and gave no further details, but at a later press conference in Baghdad it was revealed the attack happened on Dec. 6 near Baghdad airport.

Bremer spokesperson Dan Senor said the administrator and his party was returning from an impromptu unscheduled meeting when the attack happened, and no one was harmed.

"We have reason to believe it was a random opportunistic attack not specifically targeted at him," Senor said.

In Washington, a senior US defense official said a roadside explosion blew out the tires of a lead vehicle in a convoy carrying Bremer as he returned from seeing off visiting US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at the Baghdad airport.

A windshield in the vehicle carrying Bremer further back in the convoy was cracked by the force of the explosion, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. *AFP*



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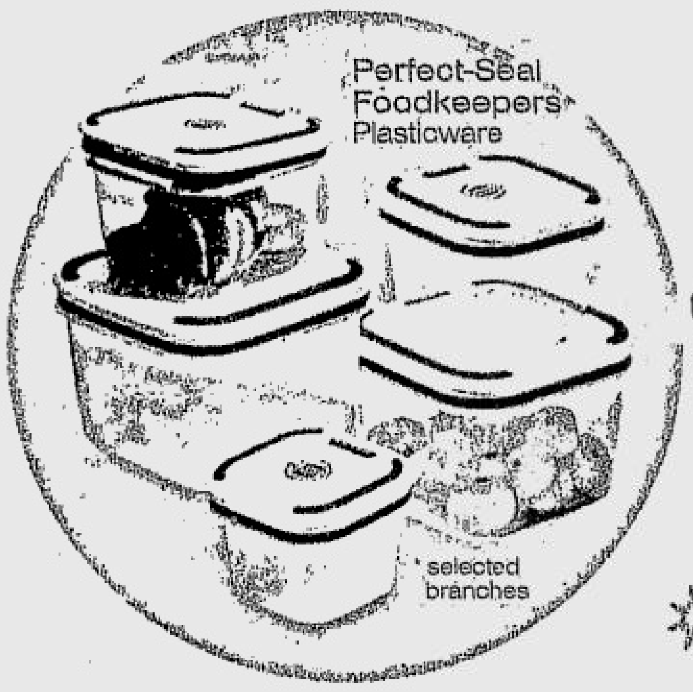
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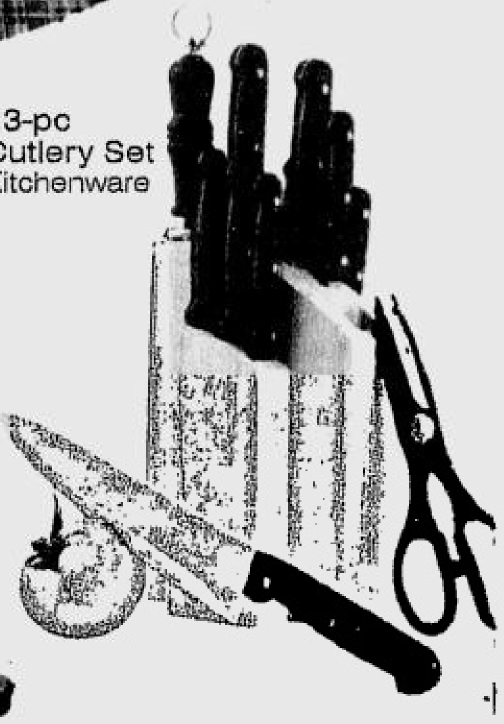
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OPINION

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Changing fortunes

EDITORIAL

PRESIDENT George W. Bush of the United States has hailed the capture of Saddam Hussein as a "turning point" in the history of Iraq. But three days after Saddam's arrest, suicide car bombers mounted attacks, killing people in Iraq, indicating that his capture did not end the guerrilla strikes.

If there was a turning point at all, it was in the political fortune of Bush. The capture of Saddam was followed by a rebound in Bush's sagging popularity. Bush was the main beneficiary of Saddam's arrest. A survey taken just days after the capture show that Bush's approval rating jumped to 58 percent. The number of Americans who disapproved of his performance fell to 3 percent, down from 40 percent.

The results of the survey show that the capture temporarily eased heightening concerns about US economic and foreign policy. But while the arrest lifted Bush in US public opinion, the survey said 60 percent of Americans believed the United States was vulnerable to a terrorist attack as it was before Saddam's capture. The survey also showed Americans were worried that the attacks on American troops would continue and that Bush did not have a plan to extricate the United States from Iraq.

The bombings that followed Saddam's capture tended to support the conclusion that the spiraling guerrilla attacks on coalition troops following the collapse of the Saddam regime were neither directed nor coordinated by Saddam. American troops who pulled out Saddam from a "spider hole" in Tikrit found him in possession of small firearms and a suit case full of dollar bills. Saddam is believed to have moved from one hiding place to another for eight months. Apparently Saddam was more concerned with eluding search teams than directing guerrilla operations. It is becoming clear that the attacks were autonomous acts of Islamist extremists who hated the presence of foreign troops that invaded Iraq.

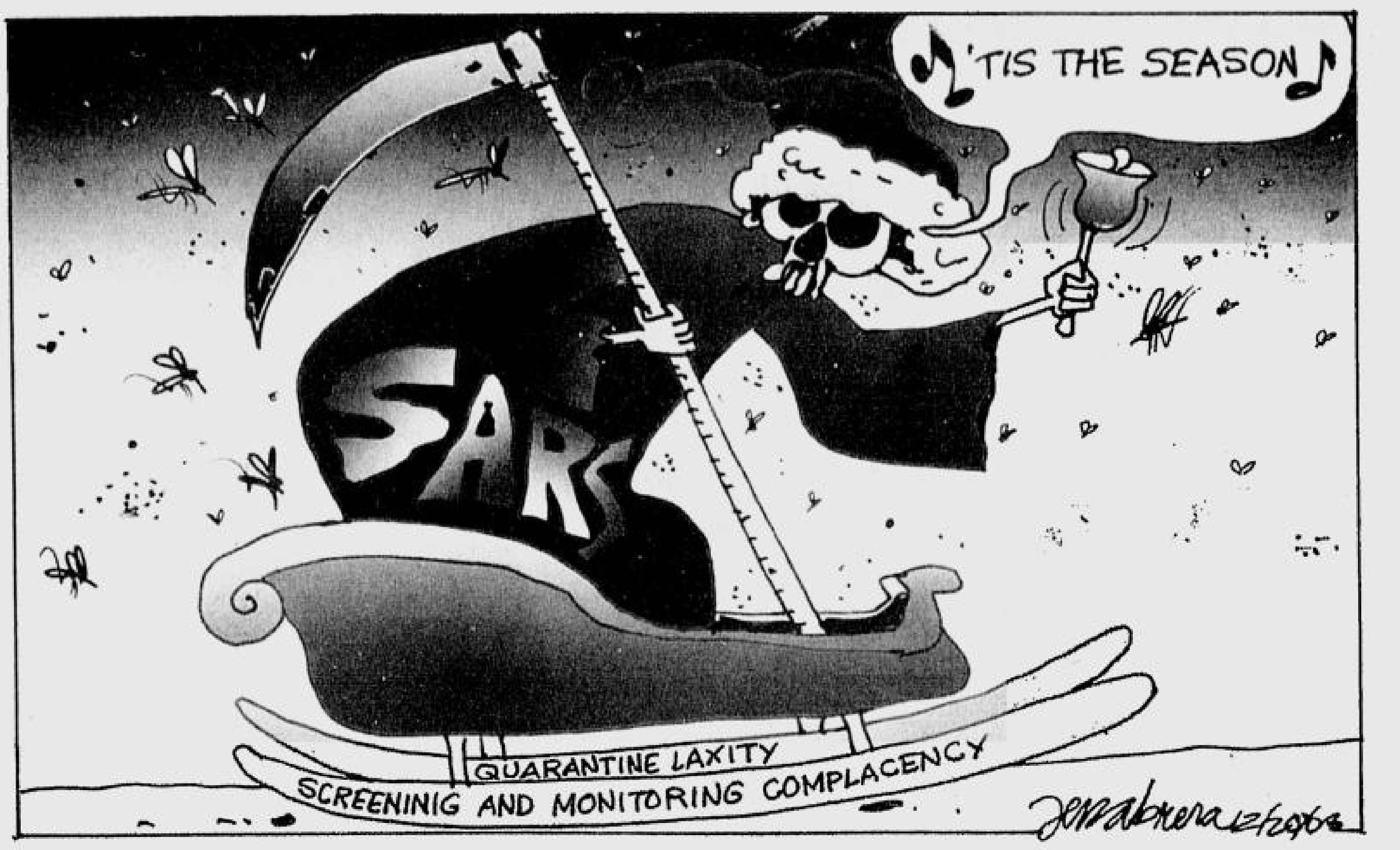
The capture of Saddam achieved one of two main objectives of the coalition forces when they invaded. But the other major objective has not been achieved: finding confirmation for US suspicions that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. With Saddam in captivity, US interrogators hope they can extract more information from him to confirm the claim, which was the key justification for launching the invasion.

The ignominious manner in which Saddam was arrested shattered his image of invincibility in the Arab world, which viewed him as the symbol of pan-Arab nationalism, who struggled against Western exploitation of the Arab world and of their oil resources. One other consequence of his arrest is that it may have demoralized resistance to efforts by the coalition occupiers and their Iraqi surrogates to restore order in Iraq and build a democracy on the ruins of Saddam's brutal dictatorship. Even though Saddam may not have had a hand in directing the guerrilla attacks, many Iraqis who were sympathetic to the rebuilding project were hesitant to come out in the open for fear of retribution, if Saddam returned to power.

The capture showed that Saddam was not only deeply feared but also reviled for his brutal human rights abuses and repression of regime opponents. There was celebration following his capture, in some parts of Iraq and especially among the Shi'ites, the enemy of the Sunni minority to which Saddam belonged. But the hatred toward Saddam has not been translated into active cooperation with the coalition's effort to build democratic institutions in Iraq.

As long as foreign troops occupy Iraq, which lies in the heart of the Arab world, they will remain the focus of resentment, feeding Arab nationalism, and the targets of guerrilla action. Thus, Saddam's arrest doesn't eliminate the threat of terrorist attacks in the United States. It only proves that he had nothing to do with the Sept. 11 attacks by al-Qaida terrorists on New York and Washington, D.C.

Saddam's arrest ended a brutal tyranny in Iraq, but the al-Qaida is far from eradicated. The United States may have Saddam in its hands, but it has failed so far in catching Osama bin Laden and wiping out the al-Qaida terrorist network. Islamic militants, instead of carrying out attacks in the United States, have now shifted their targets. They are hitting American occupation forces.



Saddam falls

SEPARATE OPINION

Isagani A. Cruz

THE NEWS broke late Sunday evening and elbowed out all other reports. Saddam Hussein had been captured by the US forces near his own hometown. The fugitive was holed up in filthy quarters pathetically unlike his lavish palaces. With his unkempt hair and scraggly beard, the tyrant who had peppered Iraq with his statues and mammoth pictures could have been unrecognizable in an anonymous crowd.

Some unidentified Iraqi, probably one close to the despot or a victim of his cruelty, must have tipped off the US forces for the $25 million reward. They decided to see for themselves and hit the jackpot. Saddam readily identified himself. Still wary of their good fortune, the captors conducted DNA tests that confirmed their suspicions. The man who now looked so tame and haggard was really the despised Saddam Hussein.

The news spread quickly and was received by the Iraqis themselves with boisterous glee. There was celebratory gunfire in Baghdad from many people who were elated over the tyrant's capture. Back of their minds had lurked the fear that the missing ersatz leader would come back one day to restore his fiendish rule. Now that worry was over.

The announcement also laid to rest the widespread conjecture that Saddam had fled to some friendly country where he would enjoy political asylum. So many fallen leaders had escaped their country's vengeance, from Kaiser Wilhelm of World War I to such later villains as Idi Amin and Fulgencio Batista, to the safety of a foreign state.

The question now before the world is, What will happen to Saddam? Better still, what will they do to the captured rascal? His two sons are both dead, felled by the invaders' bullets. What now for the chief culprit?

Nicolae Ceaucescu of Romania and his wife Elena oppressed their country for many years until they were ousted in a revolutionary coup in 1989. They were tried by a people's court and summarily executed by firing squad. Hitler and some of his confederates took their own lives rather than submit to the wrath of their countrymen or the justice of the Allies. Benito Mussolini and his mistress were killed, hung upside down and spat upon by an angry mob.

Saddam ruled and terrorized Iraq for more than 35 years before he met his deserved end with the destruction of his country by the Coalition invasion and his capture last Sunday in an underground refuge unfit for human habitation. He surrendered meekly and did not use his weapons to resist his captors or kill himself. He had urged his followers to fight the enemy to the death but did not have the guts to follow his own exhortation.

For all his deviltry, it is not likely that Saddam will be put to death. If the Coalition leaders see fit to turn him over to the Iraqi government, they will probably exert enough moral influence to prevent his execution for his crimes, or maybe they will impose this as a condition for his surrender. Keeping him alive to suffer for his sins could be a more effective punishment than killing him.

President George W. Bush expressed gratification over the capture of Saddam but did not gloat over it. It took some time—more than eight months after the fall of Baghdad—but the search was finally over. The dictator's rule, as one American official put it, was "over forever."

That deposed regime saw thousands of Iraqis imprisoned, tortured, murdered, their women raped, private properties confiscated, civil liberties violated, and human rights abused in an orgy of oppression inflicted by Saddam and his two sons. In 1990, Saddam invaded the small state of Kuwait but was stopped in his tracks in the Gulf War led by the present president's father. George *père* did not punish Saddam enough, making it necessary for George *fils* to administer the *coup de grâce*.

The capture of Saddam reduces somehow the shame of George W. Bush's failure to discover the weapons of mass destruction that he claimed as the main justification for the US-led invasion of Iraq. None of such weapons has been discovered so far, proving the tyrant's denial of developing and concealing them. In this respect at least, it was Saddam and not Bush who was telling the truth.

But Bush can fall back on his other objective, which was to free the Iraqi people from the tyranny of Saddam. That objective, however, no matter how laudable, violated the sovereignty of their brutalized country because America was again improperly acting as the self-appointed policeman of the world. Its intervention might have been necessary if the Iraqi dictatorship affected international peace, but it did not. It was a merely internal problem for the Iraqis themselves to solve.

The United States is actually occupying Iraq as if it were a conquered land subject to its authority as the victorious state in a war of conquest. The Iraqis are resentful because they are a proud and patriotic people. They thank the Americans for ridding them of Saddam Hussein but they now want to proceed in their own way to reinvent their own destiny. No more external meddling, please.

My hero

GET REAL

Solita Collas-Monsod

CALL him single-minded, call him bull-headed. But Cebu City Mayor Tommy Osmeña's single-mindedness is not, and has never been, aimed at furthering his personal interests (such as enriching himself in office; I understand he sometimes has to depend on handouts from his rich sister Minnie). What he is almost obsessive about is promoting the interests not only of Cebu City, but the province and the region as well. And he is prepared to take on anybody who stands in the way of that objective. What's more, he faces them with a combination of excellent homework, a no-nonsense attitude and an obvious sincerity that makes him hard to beat.

His most recent victory was over the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB), and that, it must be said, was no easy feat. Because the CAB has been perceived as having been "captured" (to use a term from public choice theory) by Lucio Tan, which means that its decisions tend to favor Tan's interests. A review of the decisions of the CAB on issues where Philippine Airlines (PAL), for example, is a party of interest (and that is most of its cases) would be instructive in this regard.

Why did Tommy Osmeña take on the CAB? It started with what was, to us ordinary folks, a simple and welcome request from Qatar Airways (QR) to fly between Doha (its capital) and Cebu, through Singapore. Simple, because QR had the entitlements to fly to the Philippines, and already had flights to Manila. Welcome because our overseas workers from the Visayas and Mindanao would not have to go to Manila to fly to the Middle East or Europe, not to mention that Cebu and its environs would be easier to reach as tourist destinations. That the flights would pass by Singapore, where passengers could be picked up or dropped off, also augured very well for the Philippines, and Cebu in particular. Eighty percent of our tourism arrivals come from the Asian region, of which Singapore is a major hub.

At first, it seemed to be smooth flying. The CAB officer in charge, an apolitical bureaucrat, granted QR's request in early October, and the airlines went into promotions mode, giving Cebu (according to Mayor Osmeña) a three-page spread in its travel brochures, and purchasing a jeepney and sending it to Europe as part of its marketing program. The airline also opened a Cebu office, hired 15 employees and contracted with Mariott Cebu for lodging arrangements for their personnel.

But on Oct. 30, the executive director of the CAB, Tommy Mañalac, rescinded the approval given by his OIC, saying that his subordinate had made a mistake. There could be no flights to and from Cebu by QR. And that was when Mayor Osmeña entered the picture.

First thing he did was to get a thorough briefing, which was why he learned about the promotional activities of QR, as well as its impact on the economy of Cebu and the surrounding regions.

He notes by the way that QR has gone all out in promoting Cebu, something which the national government with its money problems cannot do.

He also found out that the claim, advanced by the airlines' opponents, that Singapore's SilkAir and Singapore itself were objecting to the grant of "fifth freedom" rights to QR (the right to pick up and drop off passengers from a third country, in this case Singapore) was a lie. Mayor Osmeña found out that SilkAir made no objections, and that Singapore was actually encouraging QR flights by giving it one year of free rent, plus a grant of $200,000 to help promote Europe-Qatar-Singapore flights.

If you think that, armed with all this information and arguments, Mayor Osmeña won victory easily, think again. My sources inform me that at his meeting with members of the CAB and the so-called "Air Panel," their first gambit was to explain why granting approval for the Doha-Cebu flights was a mistake. At which point (which was obviously very early in the meeting), the mayor reportedly lived up to his reputation and blew his top. His colorful language will not be repeated here. In essence, he said that the CAB should not ignore the additional tourist revenues, the development of Central Visayas, the convenience of thousands of overseas workers and Muslims going on Hajj, not to mention the wishes of four million Cebuanos in favor of the wishes of one airline.

With due respect to Mayor Osmeña, I suspect that in this case not all the economic homework, no-nonsense attitude and sincerity that he could muster would have won him a reversal of the CAB ruling. But he had done his political homework as well, and made sure his political backing could neutralize Tan's clout. Which is apparently why those who supported Mañalac's withdrawal of approval (including Mañalac himself) reversed themselves and granted QR a six-month provisional approval while the requisite papers are being processed. The only remaining objectors were representatives of PAL and Air Philippines (AP), both controlled by Tan.

The irony of it is that neither PAL or AP flies the Cebu-Doha route. Neither do they fly to Europe. They just want to make sure nobody else did. And they would have gotten their way, except that Tommy Osmeña stepped in. My hero.

It is too early to tell whether all's well that ends well for the good guys. But QR's inaugural flight took place a week ago, with an initial offering of $800 for round-trip tickets to Europe, one-third less than the going rate. Round one for the Philippines.

Motivating overseas Pinoys

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

ON THE EVE of the Second Global Networking Conference at the PICC last week, where some 4,000 overseas Filipinos were linked up with one another with the view to help their mother country and native provinces, I had a chance to discuss this phenomenon with Presidential Adviser on Overseas Filipino Communities Heherson Alvarez over dzRH. He noted that Filipinos are found in some 82 countries around the world, but when one includes the seamen who wander from port to port in their ships, then they are found in 120 countries. Alvarez recalled that the potato famine in Ireland many decades ago caused the Irish to flee to the United States, and the incomes they sent back helped develop their country. The Philippines became a direct beneficiary too, he said, for a good number of Ireland's best sons and daughters found their way here as religious and missionaries. Notable among them were Jesuit Fathers James B. Reuter, the spokesperson of the Catholic bishops, and the late John P. Delaney

* * *

Decades later, said Alvarez, there is the prospect of descendants of overseas Filipinos constituting a kind of "brown Peace Corps" devoting themselves to the service of their forebears' homeland and getting to know it more. He also paid tribute to Filipinos abroad who have invested funds to help develop their own provinces, such as Loida Nicolas Lewis, widow of US multi-millionaire Reginald Lewis, who set up a school in Sorsogon that trains people in making hams and other foodstuff for livelihood. Alvarez pointed out a multinational bank estimate that the 3.5 million Filipinos in the United States alone, a good number of whom are big-time earners such as entrepreneurs, doctors, construction magnates, earn an estimated $170 billion a year, which is double the aggregate per capita income of Filipinos at home (at $1,000 per capita threshold income). From their estimated earnings abroad, he opined, it's very easy to double the $7 billion in remittances our OFWs send, given proper motivation and incentives. He conceives, for instance, of a mutual fund being set up where they can invest their savings.

* * *

One of the purposes of the recent networking conference is to spread adequate information about two recently enacted companion legislation: "The Overseas Absentee Voting Act" and the "Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act." Alvarez said these two laws are a boon to the overseas Filipinos, since all rights enjoyed by Filipino citizens here apply to those with dual citizenships. One direct effect is that many citizens are interested in buying land here now where before citizens of other countries could only own condominiums. But Alvarez also admitted that a massive information campaign has to be mounted to allay some fears about dual citizenship, such as that of losing US citizenship if they reacquire Filipino citizenship.

* * *

I have noted the great number of books being published recently and I must add to this list the biography of former ambassador and business entrepreneur Ramon del Rosario Sr., titled "Ramon V. del Rosario: The Making of an Entrepreneur," by business journalist Roel R. Landingin, correspondent for the Financial Times and a regular contributor to Newsbreak magazine. The book chronicles the life and times of the business pioneer commonly referred to in business circles as "RVR," the "brains and hands" behind the industrial-powerhouse group of Phinma and Filoil, the country's first Filipino oil refinery.

The book traces Del Rosario's life, his professional and personal philosophy, and the world of business he entered into in the '50s, which has been called the "golden age of Philippine manufacturing." RVR entered the scene at a time when government allocation of dollars was critical and he founded his companies and made sure they flourished, on more than mere state support. The book is the story of a remarkable Filipino businessman as well as the beginnings of modern entrepreneurship here. But what spices it up, as his son, former Finance Secretary Ramon del Rosario Jr., put it, are the stories and anecdotes from RVR himself, who, as everyone knows, is an irrepressible raconteur.

* * *

Last Sunday evening our editor in chief Letty Jimenez Magsanoc hosted a *despedida* party for our multi-awarded colleague, columnist, political analyst and editorial writer Amando Doronila at the residence of INQUIRER founding chair Eggie Duran-Apostol. Doro will spend his one-year sabbatical from the INQUIRER in Canberra, Australia, to slow down and rest after his recent mild stroke, but primarily to write his memoirs on his 40 years in the journalism profession. He said his book, to be titled "The Outsider," will take a look at the country's contemporary history from his vantage viewpoint as he saw it unfolding over the past 40 years. He has to leave and retreat to a "slow place" like Canberra to write, as it's impossible to do this in fast-paced Manila where everyday brings the unexpected, he said.

As both Letty and publisher Isagani Yambot emphasized, Doro, whom Gani called "a national treasure," will be sorely missed not only by INQUIRER readers but by those he influences profoundly: our leaders. They both "ordered" him, therefore, to return as soon as possible, but this could be a problem since Doro is looking forward to enjoying his sabbatical, during which he promises to do some great cooking for anyone who cares to visit him, in addition to writing. But he'll be back to cover the 2004 elections and send his analytical pieces from time to time.

We wish Doro all the best and hope he takes good care of himself. There are a lot of things to do in this country and he has a crucial role to play.

Poverty, the Manila Cathedral and Christmas

COMMENTARY

Denis Murphy

THE POOR poured into the cathedral and up the middle aisle for the 17th annual celebration of their Panunuluyan—old people, nursing mothers and hundreds of children. Watching them, I remembered Jaime Cardinal Sin's words to the same poor people last year: "This is your home. You belong here more than anyone. You are home here." Over 3,500 entered, led by giant puppets of Joseph and Mary.

Children looked around in wonder at the huge, silent church and the bluish light the sun made shining through the stain glass windows.

There were rows of chairs covered in white cloth set up in front for an afternoon wedding. The poor didn't sit there as if they knew the chairs were not for them. Fr. Anton Pascual, who said the Mass, finally suggested they use the white chairs. Once the Mass began, the cathedral divided: in the front, half or three quarters of the people followed the Mass; at the back of the church was a playground, full of children who found the marble floors a great place to play, for crawling, sliding, somersaulting, dancing. The front was quiet; the back was noisy.

"When do we eat?" a young boy asked me almost as soon as we got settled in. He was hungry. Many of the women and children were there because there would be a meal after the Mass. It was a reminder that food is the most serious problem of the poor. Hundreds around me were hungry.

The minimum amount of food a family needs each day costs P160, according to the government. This hardly seems enough for a family of five or six people, but poor families in Metro Manila on average spend only P100 a day on food. P20 a day for one person's food!

Everything was going peacefully. A young girl's beautiful voice filled the cathedral as she sang the Responsorial Psalm. Mothers nursed their babies. Some couldn't be more than 16 or 17 years old.

Then someone said, "Sunog sa Baseco," and immediately the word spread and hundreds of people were stampeding out of the cathedral. I tried to calm them, but I saw panic in their faces.

The fear of fire is deep and almost primitive in poor people. Fire is always possible. In the last two years, for example, 1,500 families in Baseco lost their homes in two major fires.

It turned out there was no fire, so slowly the people returned.

Hunger and fire, and if you want to find two other horsemen to match those of Revelation—Famine, War, Pestilence and Death—you can add insecurity and powerlessness. Everything in the life of the poor hangs by a thread: they can be evicted or lose their jobs anytime. Only 20 percent have regular work. If they can't work, they have to remove their children from school. Or they go deep into debt if someone is sick, and where will the repayment come from? They can be caught in the middle of fights, gang wars, drug wars and political killings in their areas. There is no security, and they feel there isn't anything they can do about it. They are powerless. They can be abused, insulted, humiliated and can do nothing.

Many went to receive Communion but more people who probably lead lives completely acceptable to God didn't go. They are Catholics and happy to be in the Church, but only about 5 percent go to Mass on Sunday. The Church doesn't take very good care of them.

After Mass, the food was distributed. Everyone got enough in the end, but it took a long time. Three boys shared an egg and a *pan de sal* while they waited. When they finished they put their fingers into the little plastic bag that held salt and licked their fingers. I watched the children trying to eat apples. It seems it was the first time they had an apple. A little girl of 3 or 4 smiled at me. She was beautiful but her teeth were rotten. I touched her thin shoulder and it was like touching a healthy child's wrist.

After the people eat, they feel better. The music and the contests begin in Plaza Roma. A children's choir sings carols and I challenge anyone who knows the slums not to marvel that such beauty can come from there. To appreciate our old carols you have to hear them sung by poor children. "The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head...," the children sang.

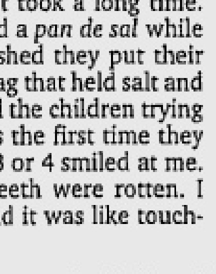
This Christmas or soon after, may the children of the poor lay down their sweet heads in a clean house where they are safe, safe from fire and violence. And may they have a good school to go to, with teachers who have time to break through the years of neglect and bring to life the talents in their hearts. May they never be hungry again.

It's Christmas, but it's also election time and it may be useful to remember what the Bible wants the leader of a country to do:

Give the King your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to the King's Son;
That he may rule your people righteously
and the poor with justice.
That the mountains may bring prosperity to the people,
and the little hills bring righteousness.
He shall defend the needy among the people;
he shall rescue the poor and crush the oppressor.
He shall live as long as the sun and moon endure,
from one generation to another.
All kings shall bow down before him,
and all the nations do him service.
For he shall deliver the poor who cries out in distress,
and the oppressed who has no helper.
He shall have pity on the lowly and poor;
he shall preserve the lives of the needy.
He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence,
and dear shall their blood be in his sight.
(Psalm 72)

Denis Murphy works with the Urban Poor Associates.

Pampanga once upon a time



SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Bambi L. Harper

MY friend Johnny M's ancestors were said to own most of the land in a town that was reputedly the gateway of the Huks to Nueva Ecija. His family hails from Arayat, Pampanga, in the days before Marcos decided on his version of land reform. This was a rather ingenious scheme that resulted in a loss-loss situation. The land was paid for with supposedly redeemable bonds that no doubt can be used as wallpaper but not much else. In the meantime, the farmers were the new owners but without any government support to buy seeds and fertilizer, they soon sold the land to others and ended up somewhere in Manila, homeless and landless. Whether the latest land reform schemes are any better, I leave for you to decide.

Through the years, I have visited his ancestral home which he has tried to preserve, being quite proud of his ancestry. There was a time during Good Friday when the sing-song voices of women chanting the *Pasyon* pierced the turgid summer somnolence and another occasion on his birthday when he had the town musicians sing Kapampangan songs. We also had a delightful taste of their cuisine, including *batute*, but there were no worm eggs, fortunately or unfortunately depending on your tastes.

I was naturally curious to see what visitors from another time and place would have to say about this town at the foothills of Mt. Arayat when I was reading the Duc D'Alencon's narrative of his visit to the Philippines in the late 1860s. It was April then, during the season for planting and harvesting sugar cane with the sugar extracted by a stone mill that pressed out the juice. Later the juice would be boiled several times over and poured into clay jars called *pilones*. When the sugar hardened, the bottom of the jars were opened to drain out the molasses. This was used to make rum or mixed with water for the horses. The crashed cane was dried in the sun to feed the furnaces of the sugar factory. The Duc didn't mention that the smell of this refuse was overwhelming although there's not much evidence these days after Pinatubo that Pampanga grows anything but weeds.

At the time, 46 million kilos of sugar were being exported, bringing millions in revenue to the government. England and Australia bought four-fifths of the total. Sugar then was not processed locally but abroad. Most of the primitive instruments utilized in the process are now decorating lanais and yards of Filipino collectors.

For those who have never seen it before several disasters struck, Pampanga was not only covered by stalks of sugar cane but "fine trees of remarkable foliage." Passage to Arayat was through Mexico and Sta. Ana, where the forested mountain of the same name was seen rising solitarily in the middle of the plain. The Duc and his party stayed at the home of the widow of the *gobernadorcillo* who was known as Capitana Sirlang and may or may not be related to our friend Juan. The visitor, expecting nothing but a primitive *nipa* hut, was pleasantly surprised to find a well-lighted mansion with "chandeliers, huge mirrors, polished tiles and elegant furniture." (This reminds me of the foreigner who asked if we still lived in tree houses. I said mine had an escalator.) The *capitana*, who didn't speak Spanish, nevertheless greeted them on the stairs, wearing her *baro't saya*, chewing betel nut and holding a lighted cigar in her hand. She led them around the house, proudly showing off her bed covered with embroidered *piña* and three ivory statuettes representing the Infant Jesus, the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, garbed in rich fabrics.

Capitana Sirlang served them deer meat as the main dish, although the other viands are not mentioned. The lady and her daughters did not sit and eat with the guests but instead supervised the service. After dinner, the guests were led to a table with cigars and betel nut and only then did the family eat their supper.

Father Torres was the parish priest of Arayat, and his spacious convent, fronted by an *ilang-ilang* as tall as the house, was surrounded by a garden. A path led to the mountain "under the shade of bamboos, mimosas and a hundred trees." In the forested mountain was a spring where the priest had constructed a pool and his own private *casita de recreo*. (Many years later a resort was developed there and President Manuel Quezon had his rest house. He is rumored to have planted teak trees which were subsequently cut down, so that Arayat is now as now bald as the endangered eagle.)

From Arayat, the party proceeded to Sulipan, hometown of the Arnedos (some of whose belongings are with their descendant Gene Gonzalez of Café Isabel; others may be viewed in the lifestyle museum at De la Salle in Dasmariñas, Cavite—a project of Brother Andrew, another Arnedo descendant). The main house, mentioned in Felix Roxas' collection of articles, later burned down. What remains hardly has anything left of the splendor mentioned by Roxas.

The Duc does not mention his host by name but only states that he was a *mestizo* Sangley, whose house was not as large as Capitana Sirlang's, but their rooms were perfumed by sampaguita garlands "while the rich drapes of our beds are redolent with incense."

What is striking about these accounts is the continuous mention of nature beside the built heritage, such as shaded towns situated on banks of navigable rivers "whose shores are lined with gigantic bamboos." Bulacan, he noted on his way to Manila, had "bamboos and mango trees forming an arch over the road; small rivers meander gracefully in the middle of farm lands; here and there, the native huts are shielded behind fruit trees and their own gardens. Misery seems unknown in this magnificent land."

Street talk

YOUNG BLOOD

Ivan Picazo

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

THE SOUND of my seatmate's pen tapping the wooden chair takes my attention away from the professor. As I shake my head to try to concentrate on the day's lecture, there's another momentary distraction. With my peripheral vision, I espy another classmate scribbling: "I love F4... I will marry Jerry Yan." Ah, the struggles a student has to go through, while waiting for five more minutes for the end of the class.

While learning inside the classroom has been proven to be effective, it is not the only place where one can get an education. I know, for it is outside the four walls of the university where I get most of it. In fact, it is from ordinary people that I get the lessons that are most useful in my life.

One important fact that I learned recently is that Filipino voters are mature. Based on the comments I have heard about politics, I can boldly say that there is hope for this country.

"Little Mc," as its patrons fondly call it on account of its proximity to the more prominent fast-food outlet, is a nondescript cafeteria along Katipunan Avenue in Quezon City. It is a refreshing alternative to commercial food chains as it offers "real food" at cheap prices. But more than that, what makes me return to the place quite often is its owner, a charming lady of about 50. A conversation I once had with her proved very pleasant and informative.

After our exchanges on superficial matters, the topic of our conversation shifted to politics, and I was overwhelmed by her deep knowledge of current events. Her take on national issues, I could not dismiss for they were supported not merely by facts but by her personal experiences.

She told me that despite President Macapagal-Arroyo's boast about the progress made by the Philippine economy during her term, the majority of Filipinos are still very poor. Manang wondered why she was poorer, despite the fact that all her children had already graduated. Why was she finding life harder when her canteen was open until 10 in the evening, whereas before she would turn away customers who came after 8 p.m. and she was operating even on Sundays. For what she could see, she said, the President could not concentrate on improving the economy because she was politicking too much and paying political debts rather than working for the well-being of the poor.

My friend sure knows what is happening in our country and its implications on her existence. People like her no longer believe everything they are being told. They try to discern the truth from what they hear or read, and they analyze personalities to determine what they are really worth.

The *tambay* in the squatters' area in Katipunan also have interesting things to say. This I could glean from conversations while waiting for a jeepney ride: If the likes of comedian Tito Sotto and the manipulative Ed Angara are to be believed, their candidate already is a runaway winner among the D and E classes. This is an insult to that particular sector of society. The poor will study the credentials and track records of candidates before choosing whom to vote for. After the disaster that was Joseph Estrada, the masses have already learned.

The *tambay* even have a retort to the slogan of FPJ partisans which says "*Siya na* Poe!" Apparently dreading the thought of having an inexperienced actor as president, they say an appropriate response would be "*Diyos ko* Poe!" And if the Philippines would have another actor as its president, they joked, they would rather fly to America.

An exciting discourse such as this was not to be missed, so I eavesdropped some more. They said that if they voted for Estrada, it was because he had some experience in government before he sought the presidency. This was something Poe didn't have, they noted.

It is sensible conversations like these among ordinary people that reinforces hope in me. It is from this sector that one can really get the pulse of the majority, for they comprise a big bulk of our population. And I find it so inspiring that, contrary to what some intellectuals believe, the *masa* now really think and analyze. They cannot be easily swayed by mere popularity and empty claims of achievement.

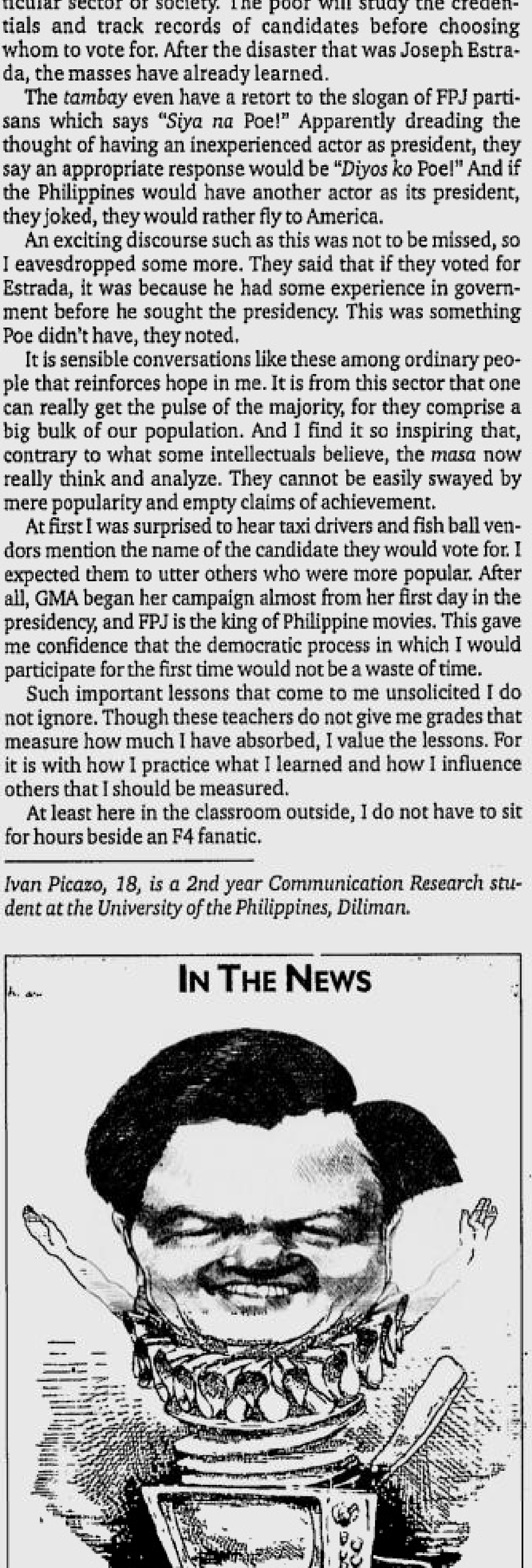
At first I was surprised to hear taxi drivers and fish ball vendors mention the name of the candidate they would vote for. I expected them to utter others who were more popular. After all, GMA began her campaign almost from her first day in the presidency, and FPJ is the king of Philippine movies. This gave me confidence that the democratic process in which I would participate for the first time would not be a waste of time.

Such important lessons that come to me unsolicited I do not ignore. Though these teachers do not give me grades that measure how much I have absorbed, I value the lessons. For it is with how I practice what I learned and how I influence others that I should be measured.

At least here in the classroom outside, I do not have to sit for hours beside an F4 fanatic.

Ivan Picazo, 18, is a 2nd year Communication Research student at the University of the Philippines, Diliman.

IN THE NEWS



Sen. Noli de Castro

‘Da King’ to ‘Da Fool’

FERNANDO Poe Jr.’s latest no-show in the much hyped “United Opposition” formal drafting following his similar stunt in the business forum, should give the voters a taste of what we can expect from his presidency: administration by doubles.

His choice of proxies (comedian Tito Sotto as spokesperson and a mixed-match of disgraced politicians as core backers) is also a good indicator of the quality of people he’ll appoint to serve under his administration.

By now he should realize that unlike in the movies where he has doubles to make him look good when doing dangerous stunts, as president he’ll be acting behind a glass wall where his limitations are exposed and even magnified. No unlimited takes. No doubles.

If he’ll risk all these including bringing the country back to being the big joke of the world just like during the time of his *pareng* Erap, he should be ready to exchange his title “Da King” for “Da Fool.”

Cut!

—ED DAMES,
26/F The World Center,
Gil Puyat Avenue,
Makati City

Getting the facts straight

I WRITE in reaction to a column of Belinda Olivares-Cunanan. (PDI, 12/8/03)

Some corrections have to be made on what was written. First of all, I am not a son of Danding Cojuangco’s sister Isabel, I am merely her nephew. While it is true that I am running for Congress in the coming May 2004 elections, it would not be in the third district but in the fourth district of Quezon City where I have been serving as a city councilor.

I was first elected as a city councilor in 1998 and was reelected in 2001, when I received the highest number of votes in my district and garnered the highest percentage of votes in the entire city.

Secondly, I have not run for a congressional seat before; the May 2004 elections would only be my first time.

—BONG C. SUNTAY,
bcs@Philonline.com

‘Leave us alone’

IN RECENT days, Mainland China has been issuing one threatening statement after another in a brazen attempt to cow Taiwan into submission to its irrational and totally unacceptable “one-China” policy.

Chinese premier Wen Jiaobao told the Washington Post in an interview the other week that Beijing opposed any actions that may lead to Taiwan’s independence.

Wang Zaixi, vice minister of China’s Taiwan Affairs Office, has also been quoted as saying that Taiwan’s “extreme push for independence” could make the use of force “unavoidable.”

Now comes Chinese Ambassador to Manila Wang Chunggui parroting Beijing’s worn-out line and claiming that the Philippines may face a security risk in the event of a military confrontation.

According to the late Philippine Foreign Secretary Blas F. Ople, Wang told him in a recent briefing that “Taiwan strategists are looking to the Philippines as an escape route from possible annihilation.” Ople said the Chinese envoy also urged him that “the Philippines should take the initiative in defusing the situation because our security will be affected.”

We denounce in the strongest possible terms this latest series of bullying tactics by Beijing and blatant interference in the internal affairs of Taiwan.

We reiterate that Taiwan has no need to declare independence because it is already a sovereign state with its own territory, government and 23 million people, firmly committed to democracy and sustained economic progress.

Taiwan has never been under the political jurisdiction of the People’s Republic of China. Since its transfer to Taiwan more than 50 years ago, the Republic of China has successfully created a free, democratic and prosperous society.

The move to conduct a referendum to change the 1912 constitution of the Republic of China is an affirmation of the inherent basic right of the people of Taiwan to secure their own welfare and guarantee their security in the 21st century.

The exercise of the political right of the people of Taiwan to determine their own future is distinct from the cross-Strait issue. The two sides of the Taiwan Strait should resolve the issue without the use of force.

Tsai Ing-wen, chair of Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council, is right: the “military threat is not an effective solution to cross-Strait problems. It shouldn’t even be an option.”

It is indeed unfortunate that the Beijing government sees otherwise, and continues to bully Taiwan at every opportunity. We hope Beijing’s leaders will eventually see the light, and leave us alone.

—ROBERT T.J. SHIH,
Information Division,
Taiwan Economic and Cultural Office, Pacific Star Building,
Sen. Gil J. Puyat Avenue cor. Makati Avenue, Makati City

Better perspective on Meralco rate hikes

THIS refers to your banner story last Dec. 2 titled “Meralco to collect P2B from rate hike.”

We take particular exception to a statement attributed to a spokesperson of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan who allegedly said that the rate increase would be bad for business, bad for consumers and bad for the economy as a whole. He further stated that the agenda is clearly profit-making.

We beg to disagree and say that the provisional increase, put in the proper perspective, would be good for the consumers, good for business and good for the economy.

The provisional increase would actually enable the company to fully pursue deferred capital investments in our distribution system which will eventually provide better service to all our consumers and would benefit the economy as whole.

Even with the June 2003 and the 12 centavos per kWh adjustment, Meralco’s charges did not increase as much as inflation and the peso and compared to other basic products and services did since 1994.

We would like to emphasize that we serve a highly vibrant franchise area, which accounts for almost 50 percent of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Since 1999, Meralco’s capital expenditures averaged only P5 billion per year, barely adequate to service the needs of our steadily growing franchise area (700,000 new customers and 600 megawatts additional demand).

In fact, we have had to defer a number of important electric system projects. The adjustment will allow Meralco to undertake these major projects and support the expected recovery of the country’s economy.

In its order contained in the provisional authority, the commission actually found that Meralco did not have the financial capability to undertake the needed electric capital projects.

The provisional approval recently granted would update the company’s rates to more recent cost levels.

Meralco’s credit rating has also been downgraded four times in the past year, hindering its ability to attract capital and source new loans.

The commission, in its order, took note of Meralco’s financial difficulties and said that it is aware of the fact that Meralco’s present condition has resulted in its failure to meet its maturing debt obligations. It also took particular notice of the deterioration of the power firm’s credit rating, as reflected in reports of an independent international credit rating agency, Standard and Poor’s Ratings Services.

The commission added that as a natural consequence, this makes it more difficult for Meralco to secure new borrowings and finance major electric projects.

We beg for the public’s understanding on the issue. We also implore our critics to set aside personal animosities and try to be more objective before issuing unfair accusations.

—ELPI O. CUNA JR.,
vice president and director,
Corporate Communication,
Meralco, Pasig City

A child in Culion needs help

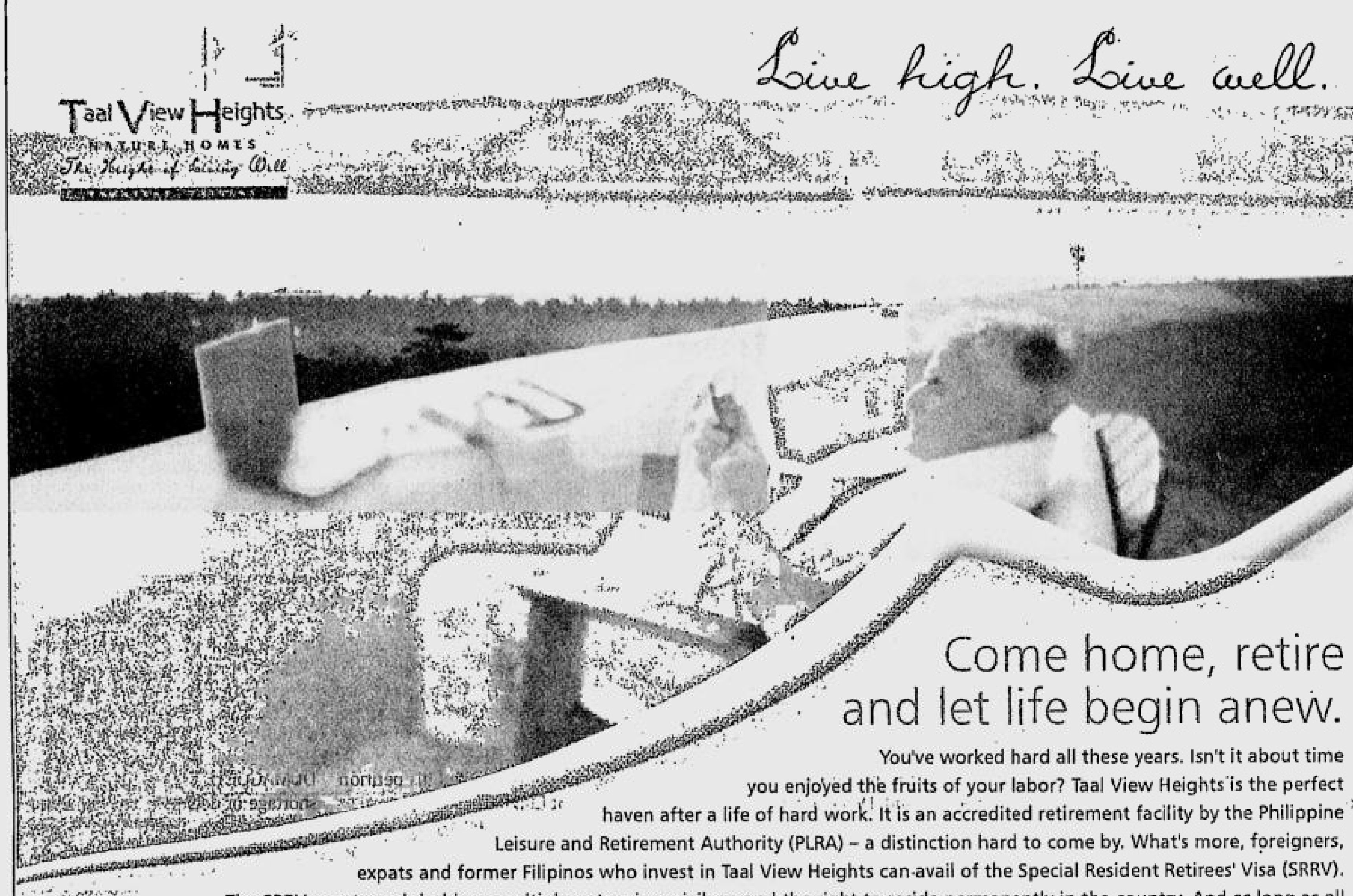
I KNOW it will be a surprise to receive a letter from this isolated island of unfortunate human beings. But I pray for your kindness and understanding for my appeal.

My daughter Bernadette Karl Datu, who is 11 years old now, is suffering from a congenital abnormality later diagnosed as autism. She is malnourished and has medication she has to take as long as she lives, and this brings continuous financial misery to our family. She also needs vitamins, food supplement, educational toys and materials.

Please help us. My income cannot suffice for our family’s daily needs because I only work as a utility worker receiving a low salary. My daughter needs to attend special schooling and this is very expensive. I ask for your mercy to help my daughter survive.

We hope to find someone, a good Samaritan who may want to share some of his or her graces and send us a little financial assistance. We pray for this mercy in this season of bounty.

—ELIZABETH DATU,
5315 Culion, Palawan



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No other farm home community is accredited. PLRA chose Taal View Heights for its rural ambiance and relaxing natural atmosphere. Taal View Heights is the epitome of a place where man communes with nature: clean, fresh air, the abundance of natural foliage and spectacular views all around.

No other farm home community comes with the benefits of SRRV. Permanent non-immigrant status with multiple-entry privileges, exemption from exit / re-entry clearance and permit, exemption from customs duties and taxes for the importation of personal effects, tax-exempt inward remittance of pensions and annuities, membership in the PLRA Executive Club, discounts in PLRA-authorized establishments, and use of PLRA membership in various golf, sports and country clubs.

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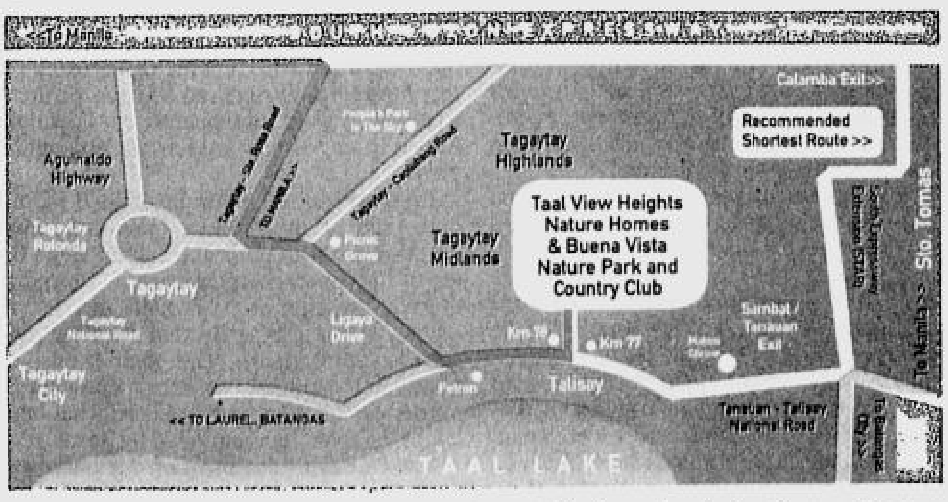

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4 people die, 26,000 flee as floods sweep Caraga

BUTUAN CITY—Flash floods triggered by days of heavy downpour killed at least four people in Caraga, and as of yesterday, already displaced more than 26,000 people in the entire region, officials said.

The Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said the rains were caused by a low-pressure area hovering over Northern Mindanao.

Liza Mazo, regional civil defense chief, told the INQUIRER that she expects the statistics to increase as waters from the Agusan River and other major tributaries in Caraga continue to inundate villages.

The region's power providers have shut down electricity in an effort to prevent people from being harmed by cut-off power lines. Several towns in the two Agusan provinces and Surigao del Sur have been in the dark for days now.

Mazo said three of the fatalities died after the boat they were riding in capsized in Esperanza, Agusan del Sur on Thursday.

On Thursday night, a team of Coast Guard operatives rescued three other people here after the raft they were riding in broke while cruising the Agusan River.

The fourth victim died yesterday while trying to salvage his belongings from the raging river in Remedios Romualdez town in Agusan del Norte.

The casualties were identified as Cornelio Barrios, 53, Sanny Frontreras and Mario Banga of Esperanza and Loloy Lagna, 18, of Remedios Romualdez.

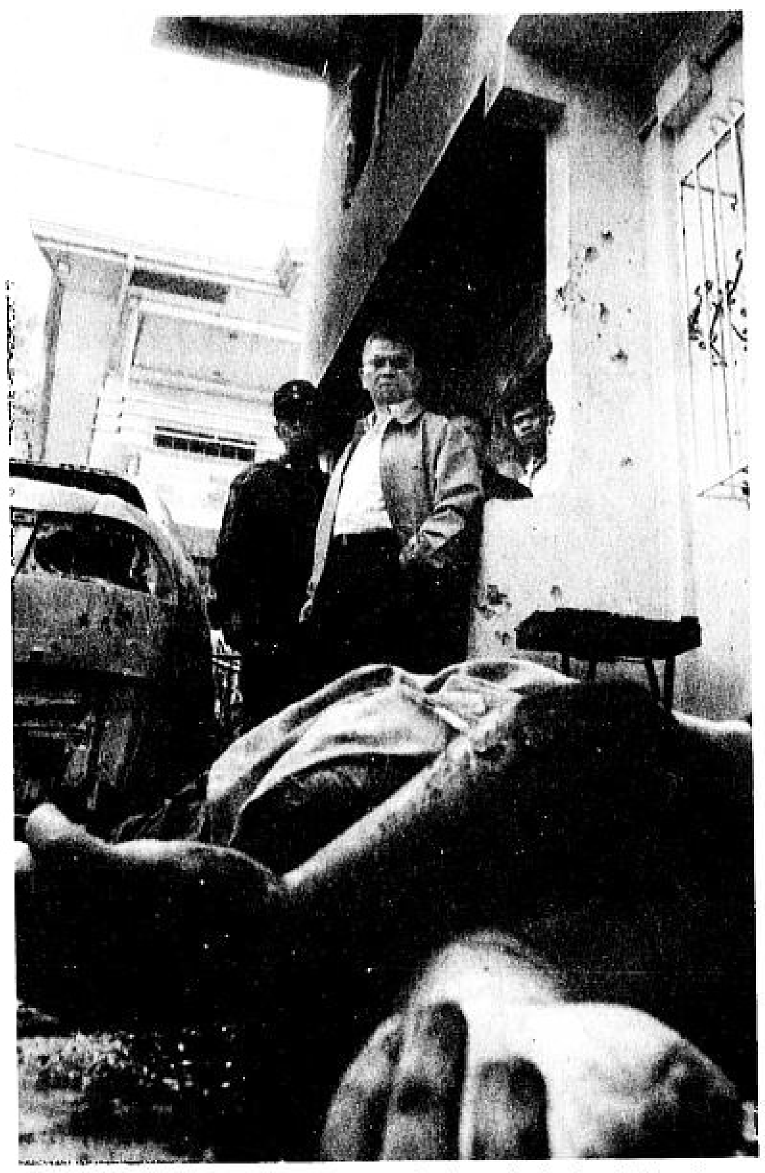
Yesterday, a passenger ship from Cebu hit a reef as it was approaching Butuan Bay amid huge waves.

Lt. Col. Angelito Gabisan, Butuan Coast Guard commander, said the 265 passengers, including five children, and the 90 crew members of MV Princess of Paradise remained stranded some 300 meters from the shoreline and were prevented from disembarking.

"They're all safe but I would not allow them to disembark because of the dangerous weather," he told a local radio station.

Gabisan said the Coast Guard would wait for the weather to at least calm down before allowing the transfer of the passengers. *Franklin Caliguid, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Chokepoint traps 3 kidnap suspects



ANTI-kidnapping czar Angelo Reyes looks at the body of alleged kidnapping leader Roberto Yap who was killed in a shootout with police in Bataan. The anti-kidnapping campaign has shifted back to full gear following Reyes' appointment. JOAN BONDOC/PDI PHOTO

By Marlon Ramos, *PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna—A brief chase in a chokepoint that anti-kidnapping czar Angelo Reyes ordered put up last week led to the fall of three suspected members of a big time kidnap-for-ransom group, including a supposed member of the Quezon provincial police, in Barangay Tubigan, Biñan, Laguna on Thursday.

Calabarzon police director Chief Supt. Reynaldo Varilla identified the suspects as PO2 Gary Villanueva, 31, a resident of Talisay, Batangas and said to be a member of the Quezon police station; Edward Marcia, 31, of Alaminos, Laguna; and Julito Aklan, 23, a resident of Talisay, Batangas.

Varilla said that as early as Wednesday, they have received intelligence reports that a group of kidnappers operating in Batangas and Quezon is targeting a Chinese-Filipino businessman in Biñan.

He said he alerted the Laguna police about the report and ordered them to be on guard for a possible encounter with the group.

Senior Supt. Benjamin Belarmino, chief of the regional intelligence operations, said that at about 9:30 Thursday morning, police in the area were already alerted after noticing that the suspects, on board a blue Isuzu Fuego (WGD 824), were suspiciously making rounds in the town proper.

When a seven-man team of policemen led by Supt. Jose Fernandez Jr. met the group at the chokepoint, the suspects allegedly tried to evade police inspection.

"They tried to speed past the chokepoint. But we were ready for them. We have put up a team in the area complete with a back up on patrol vehicle. So what ensued was a brief chase. Fortunately the suspects chose not to fire their guns," Belarmino told the INQUIRER in a phone interview.

He said police cornered the suspects' vehicle and disarmed the suspected kidnappers before they could put up a fight.

Recovered from the suspects were several hand pistols and live ammunition.

Belarmino said they have set up 12 chokepoints in the boundaries of Metro Manila and Calabarzon after reports said kidnapping gangs will operate in the region because of heightened police visibility in the metropolis.

He added that they have also ordered the setting up of over 50 chokepoints around the five provinces in the region.

But police still could not tell whether the suspects belonged to the Fajardo group whose leaders belong to the top 10 most wanted list of the National Anti-Kidnapping Task Force of Reyes.

He said they would confer with Quezon police officials about the status of Villanueva.

Chemical-laced 'adobo' kills teacher

ILAGAN, Isabela—A teacher died while 12 others were taken to the hospital after they ate chicken *adobo* that was laced with a chemical used for mouthwash during a Christmas party in San Agustin town on Tuesday.

Benito Tumamao, Isabela schools division superintendent, identified the fatality as Evangeline Manalaysay, 43, a teacher of the Bautista Primary School in Barangay Bautista, San Agustin.

Tumamao said three other teachers, three village officials and six residents were taken to different hospitals in Santiago City for treatment.

Reports said those who ate the chicken *adobo* felt dizzy and vomited later. Manalaysay died while being taken to the hospital.

Tumamao said their reports showed that a female teacher, who was among those who prepared the food during the party, could have seasoned the adobo with a white powder that she thought was salt.

He said investigation showed that the powder used by the teacher was sodium fluoride powder. The powder was distributed to schools here as mouthwash for students. *Villamor Visaya Jr., PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Man turns up to own up slay of Ecleo wife

By Jhunnex Napallacan
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—A man surrendered to police in General Santos City and claimed involvement in the murder of Alona Bacolod-Ecleo in January 2002.

Cedric Divinadira, of Barangay Labangon in this city, alleged that Alona was murdered by her brother and not by her husband, cult leader Ruben Ecleo Jr.

He said that he was acting on his own and that he did not even know Ecleo, supreme master of the Philippine Benevolent Missionaries Association (PBMA).

But the Bacolod family and the police officials doubted Divinadira's claim that he connived with the late Ben Bacolod in killing Alona.

Ecleo, former mayor of San Jose town, Dinagat Island, is detained at the Bagong Buhay Rehabilitation Center to face parricide charges for allegedly killing his wife.

One of the prosecution witnesses was Ben who, along with his parents and sister, was gunned down near their home in Mandaue City, Cebu on June 18, 2002 at the height of the police siege of the Ecleo enclave on Dinagat Island.

Ecleo was forced to surrender the next day after an all-night gunfight on Dinagat that left 16 PBMA members and one policeman dead.

Almost two years after Alona's murder, Divinadira surrendered to the police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) in General Santos City on Monday to accuse Ben of killing Alona.

Divinadira claimed that Ben strangled Alona to death after she refused to give him money.

He said he helped Ben place her inside a black garbage bag and threw it into a ravine in Barangay Coro, Dalaguete town, about 85 kilometers south of this city.

Supt. Edwin Diocos, chief of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG 7) said the Ecleo camp might be using Divinadira to muddle the case.

He said the allegation could just be part of Ecleo's defense after the court rejected his petition to grant him bail.

Alona's brothers, Niño and Josebil, also believed that Divinadira was hired by Ecleo to create confusion on the case now pending before the Cebu Regional Trial Court.

The two have been in the custody of the CIDG Central Visayas after the killing of their parents and siblings last year.

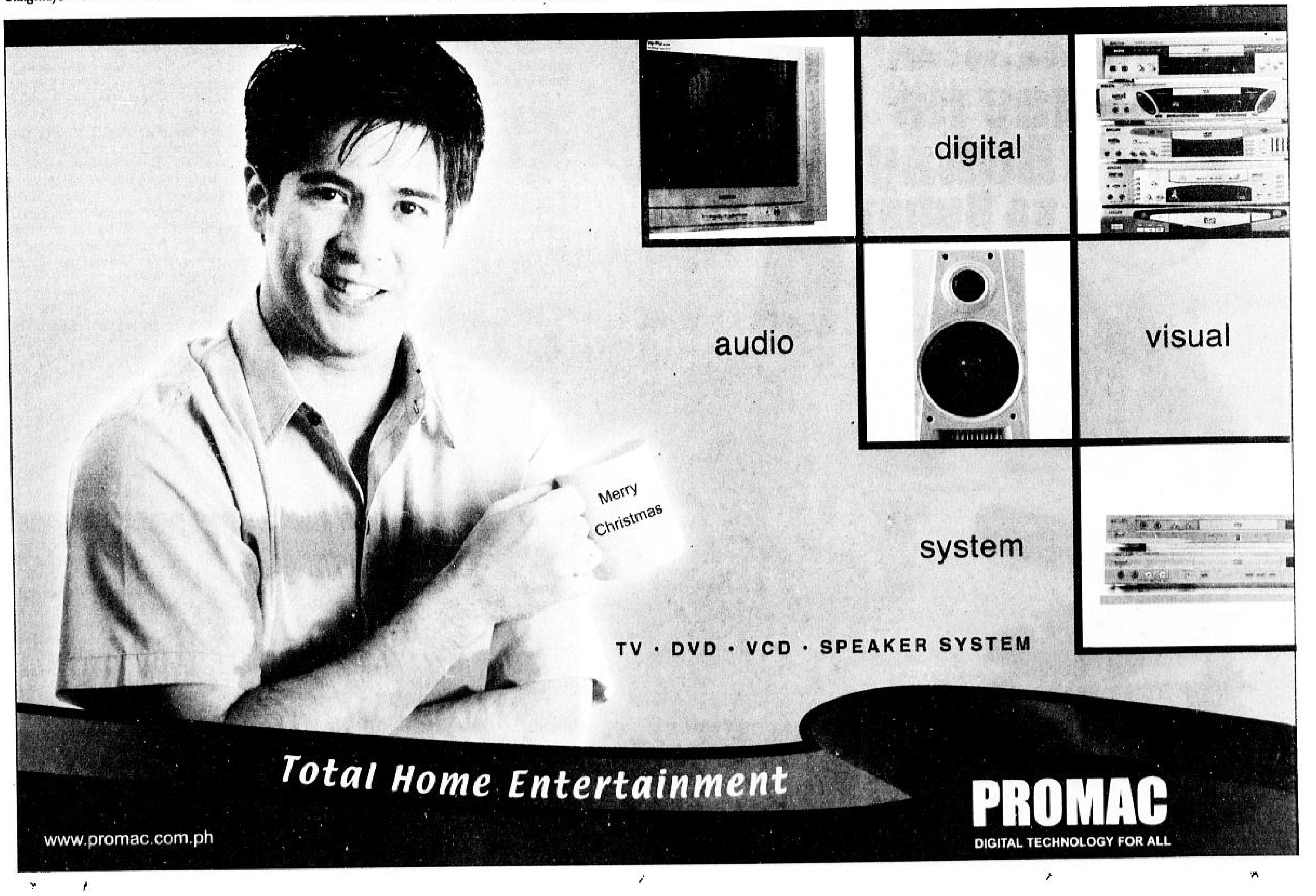
But Ecleo's lawyer, Orlando Salatandre said their camp did not have to fabricate a story because they have evidence to prove that Ecleo had nothing to do with his wife's murder.

Gov to tap retired docs

DUMAGUETE CITY—Faced with a shortage of doctors who may soon leave for the United States as nurses, Negros Oriental Gov. George Arnaiz said the provincial government will rehire retired doctors to service the needs of patients at the Negros Oriental Provincial Hospital.

The governor told a news conference on Thursday that the retired doctors had already agreed to the request.

The doctors will be on duty for at least two hours each day at the Out Patient Department of the NOPH, he added. *Alex Pal, PDI Visayas Bureau*



INQUIRER Visayas

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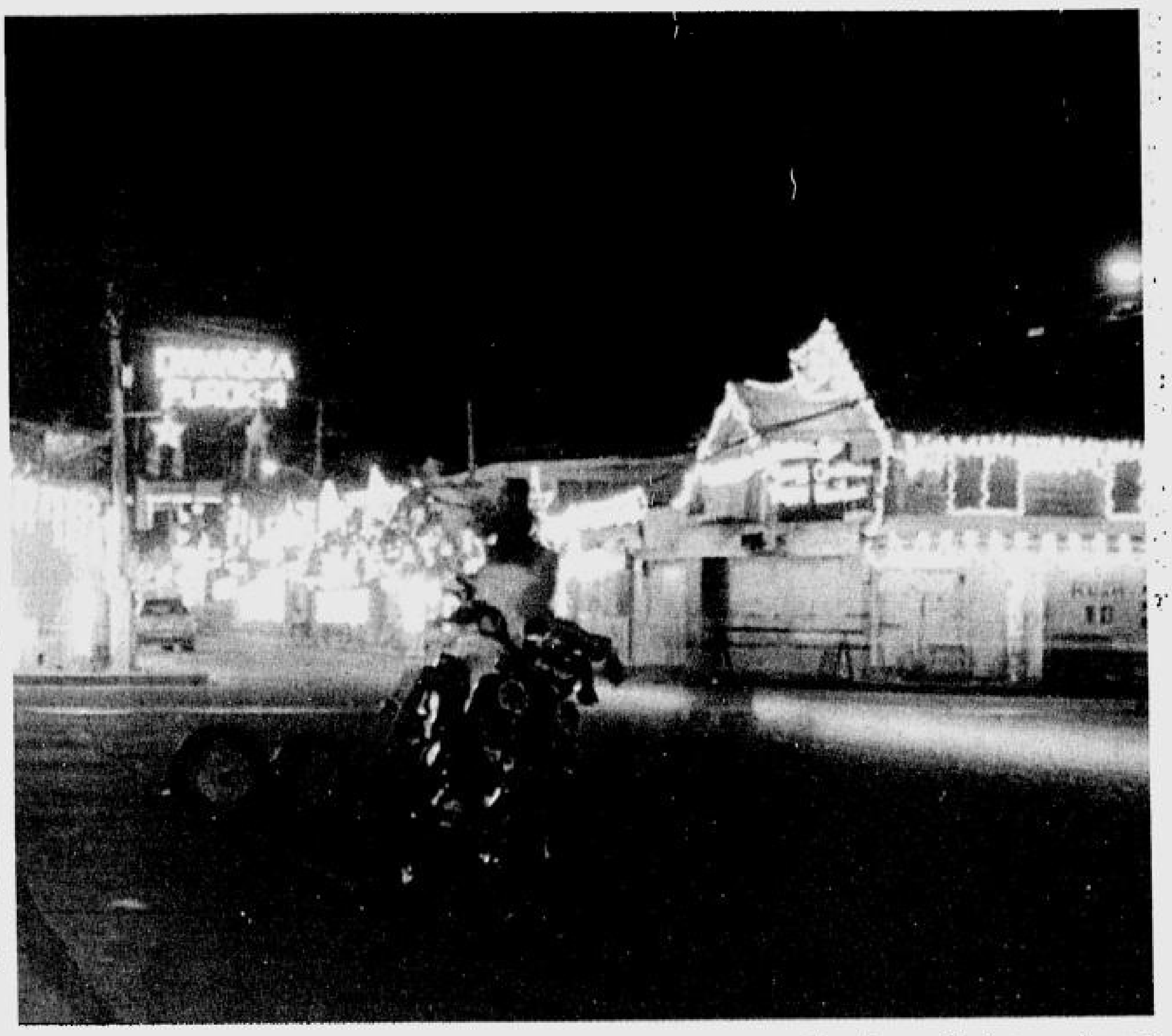
Editor **Jun Bandayrel**
Bureau Chief **Edralyn L. Benedicto**

Danao: Cebu's 'Little Las Vegas'



THE MAIN STREET of Purok Dinag-sa that won as the best well-lit area in Danao City. LITO TECSON

By Jolene R. Bulambot
Cebu City

SITUATED in the southern part of Cebu, the city of Danao is gaining popularity this holiday season, not for its widely known "*paltik*" (homemade) guns but because of its indigenous and gigantic Christmas decors and glittering neighborhoods.

A simple and quiet city during the day, Danao is transformed at night, earning for itself the monicker the "Little Las Vegas" of Cebu. Local and foreign visitors flock to the city at night to take a glimpse and experience the festive celebration.

Houses along the major streets that are ablaze with red, yellow, blue and green hues, from 6 in the evening until dawn are the major attractions.

Giant stars have been placed along the streets, adding to the festive look. Along the national highway, electric posts are adorned with handcrafted decorations made of indigenous materials.

Cebu Rep. Ace Durano, whose family has dominated Danao politics for generations, said it was the first time that the city initiated such an elaborate and expensive activity.

He said all the people actively participated in what is now known as "Pasko sa Danao."

Unity, cooperation

"I am very proud of it. It seems like a little Las Vegas because of the lights. All the people of Danao have expressed their unity and cooperation to make this activity very successful. It's our way of giving importance to the birth of Jesus Christ," Durano said.

Nelia Enriquez, 63, a resident for more than 40 years, said the people were grateful to their officials for initiating the activity.

She said their street, which belongs to Purok Dinag-sa, won as the best well-lit area in Danao.

"We have been cooperating because the idea is so nice and we are so proud that we are chosen as the best-lit area. We all did this because we love our place and we want to show to the world that we can be very creative," Enriquez said.

Samuel Vasquez, 42, won the biggest star made up of used colored cellophane with cogon grass. The star is the main attraction of Purok Dinag-sa. It is 12-feet long and 14-feet wide, and is placed on the roof of the Vasquez family's two-story house.

Aside from its scintillating, glitzy neighborhood, the city boasts of its life-size display of mangers or "*belen*." Eighteen *belen* are scattered all over the major streets.

Spectators came not only to view the mangers but they took photographs and videos as well.

Mary Jane Rito, 33, who grew up in Danao, also felt like a tourist and looked forward to a walk in the streets at night and gawk at the lights, decorations and *belen*, together with her three children.

Rito said she was amazed by the unity of the residents, who were able to come up with a very spectacular and unique way of celebrating Christmas.

She said her children were so awed at the colorful and creative replicas of Christ's Nativity that they would pass them by during their nightly strolls.

"This is the first time that we encountered such a meaningful way of celebrating the birth of our Lord. Every community here is actively involved. My children can really relate and they better understand the meaning of Christmas now, especially love, unity and cooperation that are being manifested through the *belen*," Rito said.

Ricardo Hermoso, 31, a *trisikad* (passenger bicycle) driver, appreciated the influx of visitors. He said his income had doubled since the sights starting luring visitors and travelers from nearby towns.

"Everything is so colorful here. During evenings, I go overtime because there are a lot of activities, a lot of people and passengers. I am happier now because I can earn from P180 to P220 a night," Hermoso said.

Source of pride

Councilor Alice Durano said the "Pasko sa Danao" project was conceptualized as early as October by the city government.

She said all the 42 barangays participated in the holiday activities, such as the lantern and *belen* making, street lighting and caroling contests.

The project cost more than P200,000, she said, since the city government had to give a P5,000 subsidy to each barangay, aside from the cash prizes ranging from P2,000 to P30,000.

"This is the first time Danao City hosted such a big affair in coordination with the committee on tourism. We are so proud because we have proven that we can all unite for one noble purpose. We are proud, too, because our efforts are being appreciated not only by our constituents but other visitors who came here to witness our Pasko sa Danao," the official said.

She said the *belen* are made of indigenous materials, such as egg shells, coconut husks, cogon grass, twigs and leaves from plants, as well as recycled materials, such as old clothing, used styrofor, and used bottle caps.

"We are so happy with the results because our people have creatively come up with all these using indigenous and recyclable materials. These are original ideas and we are so proud because the people here have shown support for this project," she added.

THIS LIFE-SIZED replica of the nativity scene in Bethlehem, one of the many dotting the city sidewalks, has been attracting tourists to Danao City in northern Cebu, 35 km from Cebu City. LITO TECSON

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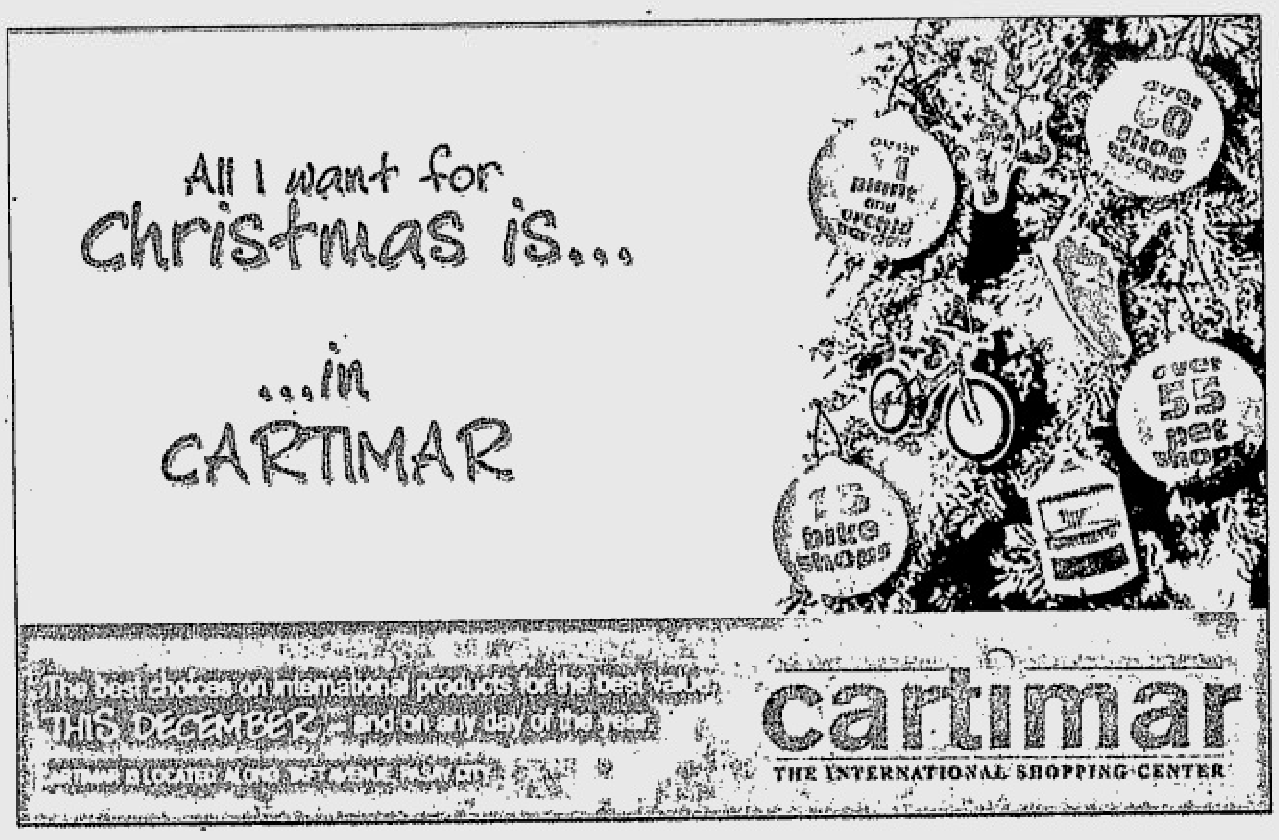

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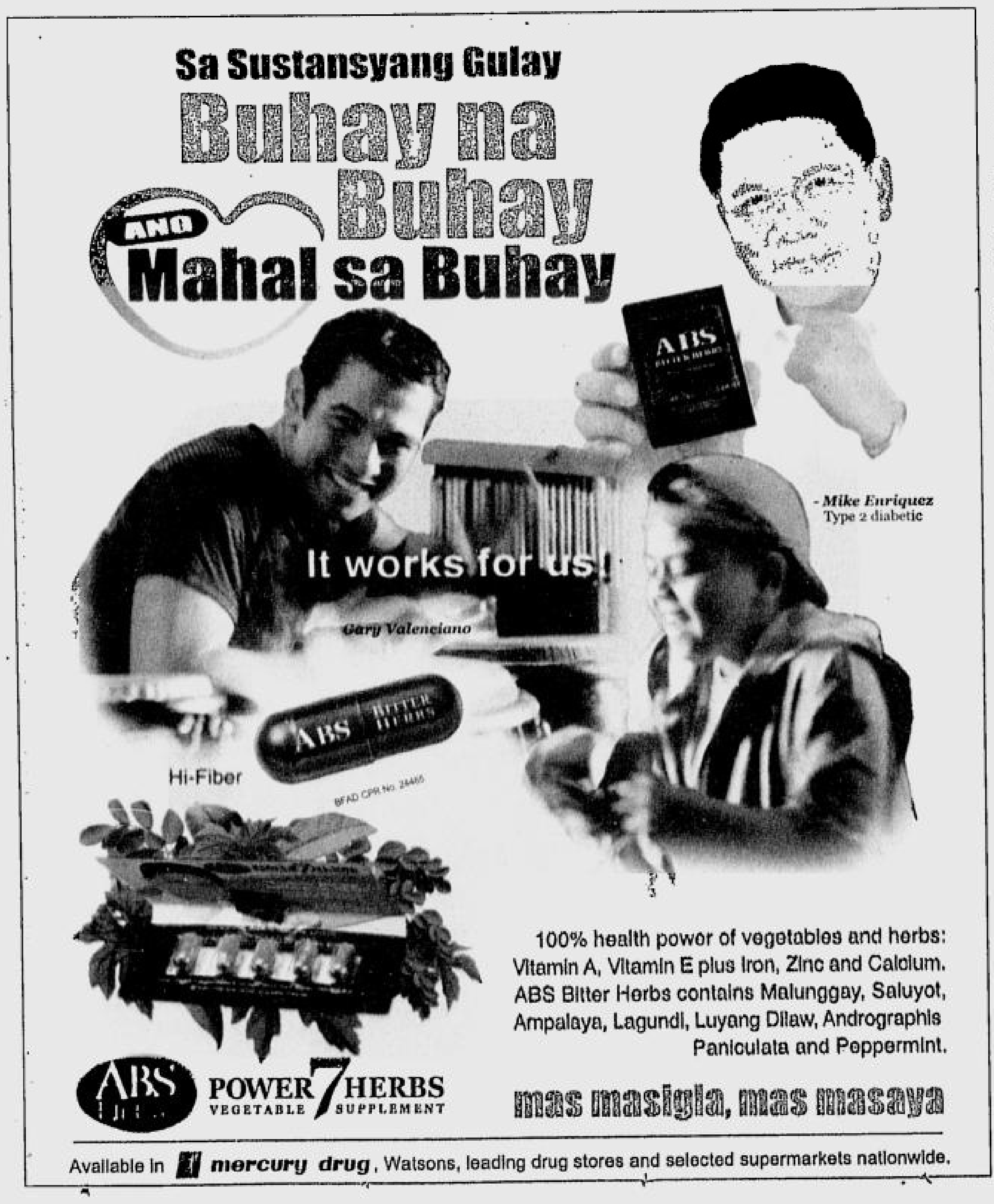

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Bro. Eddie sure to run, says only God can stop him

From page A1

own son Isaac at the last minute.

In an interview on the ABS-CBN News Channel, Villanueva vigorously refuted notions that as a spiritual leader he heard voices in his head. He said he learns God's will through prayer.

Villanueva, who said he had once spent seven years in his youth as a communist cadre, said he was running because the country needs someone without political baggage to unite it and save it from the prospect of civil war.

"What we need is the change and transformation of our nation. I've been travelling for 20 years and I've seen how our country became quite pitiful," said Villanueva. The Jesus is Lord group's missionary work has spread the movement throughout the country and into other countries with large overseas contract workers communities.

"I wonder why our country is poor when it is so rich in natural resources. It (was) No. 1 in Asia in the 1930s and the 1940s. Why are we now competing with Bangladesh?" the prospective presidential candidate said.

TV station

After the ANC interview, Villanueva was reached by the paper at the offices of Zoe TV, which his group owns.

He emphasized his extensive use of consultations, noting that he was following a definite process.

"I am waiting for the last indicator from Task Force Pagbabago which is the final approval of Bangon Pilipinas as a political party which is now pending in Comelec. And completion of political machinery by the end of the month."

After their meeting last Tuesday, Villanueva said there was no scheduled meeting with President Macapagal-Arroyo, former President Fidel Ramos, or Speaker Jose de Venecia, the leaders of the ruling Lakas Party, which he had supported.

"I have high respect for our leaders, GMA, FVR, JDV. They are my friends. We have to accede to her request for invitation but it's a different matter if I abandon the challenge of Task Force Pagbabago."

"I believe they understood that our decision to participate in (the) presidential election is for a cause which is the restoration of morality in government and the country."

"Indirectly, they accepted that there's a problem in the system. I frankly told them I am not against GMA, FVR or the leaders of Lakas. Our intention is to offer people a new brand of politics based on genuine love for country with passionate desire to stop the grinding poverty."

Beyond politics

In both interviews, Villanueva acknowledged the unlikely nature of his candidacy.

"I know this is against conventional political wisdom but I have absolute trust in the innate goodness of the silent majority."

"My firm and final decision can only be seen on or before the last date of filing of COC (certificate of candidacy)... but just the same my intention to accept the challenge is already in my mind and heart."

"I'm banking more on the silent majority on the spirit of enlightenment that will come upon them."

He said "traditional" politics had let the country down.

"My decision transcends all political exercises. That is unknown to some critics."

"I cannot go along (with) the [traditional politics] method because the very purpose is to have a paradigm shift."

He said traditional politics was "just fertilizing further corruption" and that it was "high time for thinking Filipinos to rise."

"Enough is enough of the irrational political circus."

He said his campaign platform would consist of three major planks: education, morality, and a cultural revolution.

Not a politician

Villanueva also answered point-blank the criticism that he was new to politics.

"I am not a politician and I can never be a politician, probably. My running is call to duty to lead people to righteousness and morality."

He said this will dictate the nature of his campaign. "We will never resort to attacking personalities. This is a high-level campaign fitted to civilized society. I am aspiring for public position to truly serve the people."

He also said he was praying for all presidential aspirants.

"All the presidentiables are object of my prayers for them to experience spiritual and moral regeneration... so whoever wins, we want a righteous leader."

"I respect all the presidentiables. I respect their intention for the nation. Some are even my friends but though I love my friends in government, I love the country more and the Lord most."

Villanueva said some politicians, both from the administration and the opposition, wanted to join him because, he said, "they honestly believe this cause." *With reports from TJ Burgonio, Philip Tubeza and Michael Ubac*

Amnesty plan . . .

From page A1

sensyang Pilipino was willing to assume "good faith" in the amnesty plan, there should be "a limit" to its application.

Quoting other civil society leaders, she said Ms Macapagal should stick to the principle of "reconciliation with justice."

Political bickering

But the President defended her plan to extend amnesty to political personalities, saying political bickering had hampered progress.

"The country has had enough of political bickering and partisan strife. Bitter memories of the past are hampering our goal to move forward," she said in a speech at the Armed Forces' 68th anniversary rites. *(See story on Page A1)*

She also said there could be no change before "genuine reconciliation with justice," and added:

"I would like to spare this *pagkakaisa* (unity) from politics because this is a sincere and earnest effort to transform our divisions into unity and thereby see a clear path to a brighter future."

Cojuangco

Baltazar said another issue of concern for civil society groups was the fact that only a couple of years after Edsa II, the President had opened communication lines with Cojuangco, who is facing graft cases involving the multibillion-peso coconut levy funds. *(See related story on Page A1.)*

She said that when this issue came up at the meeting, she enjoined the assembly to "put in context" Ms Macapagal's supposed meetings with the businessman: "Did Cojuangco [approach] her, or [was it] the other way around?"

According to Baltazar, she explained to the assembly that when people come into power, it is natural for those with problems, such as court cases, to approach them.

The assembly also raised concerns over how the President's actions had resulted in the "alienation" of many of her allies, Baltazar said.

She said the civil society leaders recalled, for example, how Malacañang announced the replacement of Renato de Villa by Alberto Romulo as executive secretary, without even informing the former.

"The President is unnecessarily making a lot of enemies," Baltazar said, adding that this went against the popular view that "politics is addition."

And as in the case of De Villa, Baltazar said, some of the President's alienated friends were now "coming back to hound her."

De Villa's party Reporma, along with Lito Osmeña's Promdi, recently merged with Aksyon Demokratiko, the party of presidential contender Raul Roco, to form the so-called Alliance of Hope.

General principles

Ignacio Bunye, spokesperson for Ms Macapagal, said she was determined to pursue the amnesty plan that she intends to submit to Congress for concurrence.

"The President is really earnest in pursuing this reconciliation. She'll do whatever is needed to have the legal basis for the amnesty," Bunye told reporters.

But he said the President was also "willing to listen to all well-meaning parties, including members of her own party, on how best to provide the legal basis for this reconciliation process."

"Right now the document is still a work in progress. As soon as we finalize the document, we will share it [with] the public," he said.

Like Ms Macapagal, Bunye declined to say whether the amnesty plan would cover Estrada and the Marcoses.

"Let's not go into details now," he said. "Let's just adhere to the general principles first. Once we agree on the principles, the details will follow."

He also refused to say whether he or the President agreed with the position taken by administration Sen. Robert Barbers and opposition Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. that no one should be granted amnesty without an admission of culpability or wrongdoing.

Standards

Bunye said the two senators were referring to "underlying principles" in the pursuit of reconciliation.

"We have standards of reconciliation enunciated by [Jesuit head Fr. Romeo] Intengan, and these can be used as the basis for this effort," he said.

Intengan, along with Davao Archbishop Romeo Capalla, was recently tapped by the President to serve as her facilitator with anti-government forces. Only Capalla accepted the designation.

In his paper presented during a Cabinet meeting last month, Intengan called for reconciliation after retribution.

He put forth three conditions to make reconciliation "authentic and morally acceptable"—sufficient acknowledgment of offenses committed against the common good, substantial restitution and reparation, and desistance from further activities that destabilize democracy and harm the common good.

Draft amnesty bill

The President earlier provided Malacañang reporters copies of a draft amnesty bill that, she said, she could convert into a proclamation.

The draft bill, titled "National Healing and Reconciliation Act of 2003," states that the government should "provide for a mechanism that will grant amnesty to those involved in past political conflicts."

Act of grace

In the opinion of Justice Undersecretary Jose Calida, the act of applying for amnesty is "in itself" an admission of guilt. "But it is a different level of admission from that made in court, where an accused is asked to enter a plea of guilty or not guilty," he said.

Calida made the observation in the course of expressing the support of the Department of Justice for the planned general amnesty.

He said the grant of general amnesty, with the concurrence of Congress, was part of the President's power to grant executive clemency under the 1987 Constitution.

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   c) Enclose also photocopies of your school ID with clear picture and certified true copy of your birth certificate.
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4. Entries may either be sent thru registered mail, express courier or hand-carried.
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6. Criteria for judging the entries:
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10. List of winners shall be published in major newspapers. Winners may claim their prizes at the AMSPEC office, Marketing Department – Km. 21 South Super Highway, Muntinlupa City, upon presentation of school ID with picture or certified true copy of birth certificate. For provincial winners, cash prizes will be deposited in the account of the winner, upon written request. Plaques or certificates will be sent out through local express courier.
11. All submitted entries will become properties of Amspec and may be used in promoting the brand Crayola in any of its marketing activities.
12. Decision of judges is final and unappealable with concurrence with the Department of Trade & Industry.
13. Prizes not claimed within 60 days from the date of notification will be forfeited in favor of AMSPEC with prior approval from the Department of Trade and Industry.
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METRO

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Editor **Abelardo S. Ulanday**

Police to set up checkpoints outside Metro

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

THE POLICE are set to extend their security measures to include the provinces surrounding Metro Manila, where criminals tend to flee after pulling off heists in the metropolis.

The National Capital Region Police Office is now coordinating with regional police officers of Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog to set up checkpoints and chokepoints in the provinces.

According to NCRPO director Ricardo De Leon, kidnappers and bank robbers tend to haul their victims or their loot to the nearby provinces, where they maintain hideouts. *(See related story on page A2.)*

De Leon told the INQUIRER that they hope to flush out the criminals in the outlying areas by applying the same stringent measures they have put up in Metro Manila.

De Leon said that after the successful implementation of checkpoints in Metro Manila, they are now ready to expand the measures to include Regions III and IV.

Central Luzon (Region III), which includes the provinces of Bataan, Pampanga, Zambales and Tarlac, borders Metro Manila in the north. Cavite, Laguna and Rizal, which are located south of the metropolis, are part of Region IV.

The NCRPO is also studying the possibility of including barangay watchmen to the law enforcement units manning the 11 chokepoints and 21 checkpoints in Metro Manila. At present, policemen and soldiers are overseeing the checkpoints.

In a memorandum from the NCRPO, the directors of the five police districts in Metro Manila have been asked to submit the requirements for the proposed "training" of watchmen to assess funding for the planned program.

The memorandum cited President Macapagal-Arroyo's directive to "train and develop" the barangay watchmen as the police's partner in combating street crimes.

Northern Police District director Marcelino Franco yesterday told the INQUIRER that the barangay watchmen would provide "community participation" in the chokepoints and checkpoints.

He said that motorists and passengers "tend to be relaxed" when they see that their own barangay officials are doing their part in securing the streets.

Precinct chief guns down guard in Manila

By Leila Salaverria

INSP. Victor de Guzman, a Manila police precinct commander, yesterday allegedly shot and killed a security guard who reportedly had been harassing passing motorists in Paco, Manila.

Laureano delos Santos, 42, an employee of the Masigasig Security and Manpower Agency, Inc. and an overseer of a building under construction on Leon Guinto Street in Paco, was said to be drunk when he tried to get passing vehicles to stop at around 11:30 p.m. Thursday.

According to P03 Rodelio Lingcong, an angry driver stopped his vehicle and confronted delos Santos. The driver, who remained unidentified, introduced himself as a policeman and was about to pull out his gun when his companions pacified him. When the driver left, delos Santos got more upset, took out his own gun and fired it several times in the air, challenging anyone to a fight.

Residents called the police and pointed the guard out to Insp. de Guzman, commander of the San Pablo Police Community Precinct.

Lingcong said that when the police officer approached delos Santos, the guard engaged him in a fight.

During the scuffle, de Guzman's gun went off thrice, hitting delos Santos in the thigh. The guard was taken to the Ospital ng Maynila, where he died while undergoing treatment at around 6 a.m., Lingcong said.

METROBRIEFS

4 killed in rampage

JERRY Bio on Thursday went on a rampage killing three people and wounding 12 others before he himself was shot dead in Mandaluyong City. Bio, 29, of Barangay Addition Hills, first stabbed his uncle, Miguel Gabas, while the latter was asleep inside their residence at around midnight Thursday, police said. Armed with two kitchen knives, Bio ran outside the house and hacked every person he met on the street. Two of those who died were later identified as Charlie Ramirez and Pedro de la Cruz. P02 Apolinario Atienza and Chief Insp. Bienvy Calag Jr. responded to the alarm and saw the killer in progress at the 7-11 convenience store in Barangay Hagdang Bato Libis. Wasting no time, Atienza shot and killed Bio. *Luige del Puerto*

4 cops accused of child abuse

FOUR members of the Western Police District have been accused of illegally detaining a 2-year-old boy. The policemen—SP02 Charlie Manzano, P03 Rodolfo Marzo, P02 Knowme Sia and P02 Noel Benitez—detained the boy when they arrested his parents, Liza and Eric Dimaano, in a drug bust at their residence in Quezon City last month. Liza Reofrir, grandmother of the boy, filed the complaint with the Quezon City Prosecutor's Office. She claimed that on Nov. 12, the boy was detained at the WPD headquarters from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. She said she pleaded to the lawmen to release the boy, citing his pitiful condition. But the lawmen reportedly ignored her. When the boy was finally released, Reofrir saw that the boy was weak from dehydration. The INQUIRER tried to reach the four lawmen, but was told that they were out on an operation. *Tina Santos*

Smut kills

BUSINESSMAN Paulino Leonen was apparently moved by the pornographic film he was watching that he decided to slip into the room of his male helper early yesterday morning in Makati City, police said. Leonen, 40, of West Rembo, used a knife to threaten his helper, Randy delos Santos, 27. But as Leonen was having his way with Delos Santos, the helper grabbed the knife and stabbed the businessman three times. Delos Santos later surrendered to the police. Leonen was declared dead at the Ospital ng Makati, police said. *Margaux Ortiz*

2 men rapped for drugs

DRUG charges have been filed against two Chinese men who were arrested during a buy-bust operation in the city last week. Charged before a Quezon City Regional Trial were Jimmy Co Wong, 33, of Kamuning Road, Quezon City, and Joason Zhang, 43, of 7th Avenue, Caloocan City. Both are natives of Fookien, China. On Dec. 13, the two men were caught trying to sell more than 900 grams of shabu to members of an anti-drug unit of the National Capital Region Police Office in Project 6, Quezon City. Assistant City Prosecutor Job Mangente recommended no bail for the accused. *Tina Santos*

In Manila, beggars make the rounds of courtrooms

By Tarra Quismundo

IT IS the season for giving (and asking) so these children make the rounds of the Manila City Hall wishing everybody a Merry Christmas in exchange for loose change. JOAN BONDOC

AT THE Manila City Hall, clients of the city now have to compete with beggars for the attention of court and city workers.

Dozens of people now make the rounds of offices, knocking on doors or entering rooms uninvited, wishing the workers a Merry Christmas and asking them for spare change.

Among them is 37-year-old mother Merly Vete. With two children in tow, she proceeded to where the court were holding their Christmas party.

"This is our first time to come here since it's Christmas, and we thought we could somehow make a little money," said Vete, whose family lives in Binondo, Manila.

She and her husband have five kids, aged 1 to 9.

Her husband, Dante, 32, at times works as a street vendor, but his income is not steady because of the frequent operations against illegal vendors, Vete said.

And with no stable source of income, Vete and her husband could not afford to put their kids through school.

Asked if she has plans of looking for work, Vete said that she does not have the ability to handle any job because she only reached Grade 3.

Were it not for her children, Vete said that they would not have gone to City Hall to beg.

She said she only did it now so she could buy a little something for her children this holiday.

Asked how much she had made so far, Vete replied: "*Eto, pa-barya-barya* (Here, just some loose change)."

Vete, her children and dozens like them are no strangers to Manila's court employees. They are as regular as other visitors who drop by City Hall every Christmas.

"Of course we would give them coins out of pity," said a court employee at Branch 54. "But we would not give those who come almost every day, or several times a week."

Other employees simply tell visitors like Vete that they have nothing for them.

"I never learned the habit of giving alms," said Branch 41 Clerk of Court Roma Ortiz. "But it's up to the other employees if they want to give them (beggars) something."

Meanwhile, for Vete and dozens of others, knocking on doors and greeting employees a Merry Christmas is the only thing they could think of to put them through the holidays.

Benhur gives way as mayor, guns for Congress

By Luige del Puerto

ABALOS

BENJAMIN "Benhur" Abalos Jr. will not be seeking a third term as mayor of Mandaluyong City.

Abalos said that he will instead run for Congress in next year's national elections.

Abalos, the city's 25th mayor, said he is giving way to accommodate a friend and to avert a potentially bitter and divisive campaign.

"I have done a lot of soul searching these past few months," he said. "It has has been a very painful decision, but in the end, this will be good for Mandaluyong City."

Abalos said he is giving way to Rep. Neptali "Boyet" Gonzalez II, who is already on his third term as Mandaluyong's lone representative.

The mayor said he and Gonzales have come a long way. Their fathers, Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos Jr. and former Senate President Neptali Gonzales, first forged the alliance 30 years ago.

"(Gonzales) said, 'Benhur, I already have nowhere to go,'" the mayor recalled his conversation with Gonzales.

"We are like brothers... just like our dads," Abalos said, detailing his decision. "If (we) fight it out... Mandaluyong City will be broken. We will be divided again, and I don't want that. I spent four years trying to heal the political wounds of this city. I can't let my gains go to waste."

Abalos said that he has nothing more to prove as mayor, maintaining that he would be leaving his constituents with sound economic, financial, cultural and educational foundations.

Abalos said that the most difficult part would be to explain his decision to his constituents.

He said he had announced it during a meeting with a few public teachers this week and many of them cried.

"They want me to fight it out. I had a hard time explaining to them why I have to do this. But I think they understood."

Jacko charged, faces long prison sentence

From page A1

could make Mr. Jackson ineligible for probation and impact the number of years that he could serve in prison," Santa Barbara District Attorney Tom Sneddon said after filing charges in the town of Santa Maria.

Rectal penetration, etc.

Legal experts said the definition of "substantial" sexual conduct was "rectal penetration, oral copulation, or masturbation."

Each of seven molestation charges against Jackson, 45, carries a maximum jail sentence of eight years, while two charges of plying the boy with an intoxicating agent before molesting him carry penalties of up to three years.

The alleged assaults occurred between Feb. 7 and March 10 of this year, against a youngster identified in the complaint only as "John Doe."

'Shakedown'

The court documents did not specify the age of the accuser, but media reports the charges center around a 12-year-old cancer patient who Jackson said in a TV interview he had slept in the same bed with.

Jackson was arrested four weeks ago when he gave himself up in Santa Barbara and was freed on $3-million bail after surrendering his passport.

His lawyer, Mark Geragos, issued a fiery rebuttal of the charges, saying the accuser's family was "dysfunctional" and attempting a "shakedown" to wring cash from Jackson.

"I can tell you right now, categorically, based upon this complaint that has been filed, that Michael Jackson is unequivocally and absolutely innocent of these charges," Mark Geragos told reporters in Los Angeles.

"There is absolutely no way that we will stand for this besmirching of this man with these horrible, horrible allegations."

He also suggested that Sneddon, who attempted unsuccessfully to try Jackson over another case of alleged child abuse in 1993, had "an axe to grind" with him.

The singer's family rallied to his defense, dismissing the charges as "vicious lies" motivated by "pure greed and revenge" and vowing to stand proudly by him.

Family support

"Michael is innocent," a statement issued by his mother Katherine on behalf of the family said. "On behalf of the Jackson family, we know these vicious lies are totally untrue, motivated by pure greed and revenge."

The long-awaited filing of charges against Jackson came amid a slew of news reports and child services reports saying the allegations involving the accuser were "unfounded" that have cast doubt on the case.

But Sneddon categorically denied that his case against Jackson was weak. He has also dismissed claims he is waging a vendetta against the entertainer, whose 1993 case collapsed following a huge out-of-court settlement between Jackson and the alleged victim.

Jackson must appear in court here to formally answer the charges on Jan. 16 after Sneddon agreed to delay his arraignment date by a week.

Sneddon said Jackson would have his passport returned to him to allow him to travel to Britain between Saturday and Jan. 5 to carry out contractual obligations linked to the release of his new album last month.

Earlier Jackson's spokesperson had said the singer was planning to go to Britain for a Christmas vacation.

Legal experts said the charges appeared more serious than might have been expected.

"These are serious allegations as they clearly involve far more than fondling," said Loyola Marymount University law professor Laurie Levinson, adding that it was unclear whether the sentences would run concurrently or consecutively if Jackson is convicted.

Muslim convert?

Jackson's publicist also denied a New York newspaper report that the entertainer had Wednesday night joined controversial preacher Louis Farrakhan's black Muslim organization, Nation of Islam.

"All I can say is, as far as I'm concerned, that it's untrue," he said, stressing however, that he had not spoken to Jackson on Thursday.

Jackson's brother, Jermaine, claimed the singer was locked in a toilet for 30 minutes during his arrest last month and that his shoulder was dislocated when his hands were handcuffed behind his back.

"He asked to use the restroom and they locked him in there for 30 minutes and they asked him, 'how do you like the way it smells in there?'," he told CNN's Larry King Live. *AFP*

Stranded OFWs told to give up claims in Saudi

From page A1

Philippine government into repatriating them. They had left their places of work because of unpaid wages or because they were maltreated by their employers. They had formed the Kapatiran ng mga Migranteng Stranded sa Riyadh (the brotherhood of migrants stranded in Riyadh) to press for their case.

Repatriation

Their relatives in the Philippines have written President Macapagal-Arroyo for help in their loved ones' repatriation.

But Labor Undersecretary Manuel Imson said the workers could only leave Saudi Arabia if they have exit visas.

"If they exit now, their cases would be affected. We want to resolve their cases before their exit," Imson said in a telephone interview.

The DOLE and the Department of Foreign Affairs said they were attending to the needs of the stranded workers.

"Their needs are being attended to by the embassy. We are very much willing to repatriate them. It's just that they wanted to pursue their claims first before they leave," DFA spokesperson Julie Heidemann said.

DOLE's Imson gave this assurance to the OFWs' families: "We won't let them down."

Private shelters

Imson said the embassy was trying to contact community leaders in the area who could provide shelter to the protesting workers. He said the embassy feared that the continued stay of the workers in the embassy premises might be construed by the Saudi government as an "abuse."

DFA's Heidemann said the embassy has already asked the workers' employers and other government labor bodies in Saudi Arabia to expedite the hunger strikers' claims. In fact, three or four who joined the hunger strike have already returned to their jobs, she said.

Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration chief Virgilio Angelo could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The 16 workers are Danny Mondragon, Domingo Yalung, Ernesto Villarama, Froilan de Guzman, Jimmy de la Paz, Jose Danny Ladiana, Danny Morales, Paulino Buslon, Roberto Pacquin, Jerry Ranes, Melvin Batayolam, Reynaldo Cariño, Jesulito Mergunio, Cesar Evangelista, Pepito Mepania and Jose Tejada.

According to the nongovernment organization Migrante, about 300 Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia are either stranded or unjustly languishing in jails.

Runaways are considered illegal aliens under Saudi laws. *With a report from Jerome Aning*

Motorists not so merry over Xmas parties

By Margaux Ortiz and Tina Santos

THOUSANDS of motorists were not in a holiday mood yesterday when Christmas parties held simultaneously in Camp Crame, Camp Aguinaldo and the streets around two giant television stations caused heavy traffic on Edsa and other roads in Metro Manila.

Traffic Operations Center Director Angelito Vergel de Dios said thorough inspections on cars entering Camps Crame and Aguinaldo caused a long line of vehicles that snaked out on Edsa, blocking traffic and choking U-turn slots and the service roads between the police and armed forces headquarters.

"Of course officials had to thoroughly check the vehicles going into the camps. This caused traffic jams along a significant part of Edsa," Vergel de Dios said.

Vergel de Dios added that the closure of key roads in Quezon City to give way to the street parties of TV giants ABS-CBN and GMA-7 aggravated the situation.

Closed were Eugenio Lopez Street (from Tomas Morato Extension to Mother Ignacia Street) and 11th Jamboree Extension (from Timog Avenue to Edsa), where the two TV networks held street parties from noon yesterday till evening.

Also, a portion of Banaue Street (from N. Roxas to Maria Clara Streets) was also closed for the "Paskuhan sa Banaue."

The traffic standstill sent commuters cursing and children crying.

Most affected were the southbound lanes of Edsa and many parts of Quezon City.

As of 7 p.m. last night, traffic was still heavy along the main thoroughfare.

The traffic chief said the closure of roads for parties and other celebrations was "technically not allowed."

Vergel de Dios stressed that the organizers of the parties should have sought permission from the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority so that the agency could have enforced the appropriate rerouting schedule.

But a female staff at the Quezon City Department of Public Order and Safety (DPOS), who asked for anonymity, said anyone who wished to have a street closed for any activity, only needed to secure a permit from the barangay which the local unit would endorse to their office.

She added that a traffic advisory asking motorists to avoid the affected areas and for them to take alternate routes was released beforehand.

Also, according to her, additional DPOS and traffic enforcers were deployed to managed traffic around the closed streets.

In the meantime, the police pointed out that notwithstanding the road closures, traffic volume was simply too heavy due to people going to malls to do their Christmas shopping.

Yesterday was also a Friday and many Metro Manila residents were going to the provinces.

Urban poor head ambushed

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

THE PRESIDENT of an urban poor group in Malabon City was shot dead and his female companion was wounded in an ambush yesterday morning in Malabon City

Generoso Nierras, 48, a businessman of Barangay Catmon and president of the Kapisanang Diwa ng Mahihirap in Malabon, sustained three gunshots in his head.

His companion, Marina Bergonio, 32, was hit when one of the bullets that exited the head of Nierras hit her in the shoulder.

The three killers have yet to be identified, police said.

At about 8:30 a.m., Nierras and Bergonio got into their owner type jeep that was parked at the Kadima Plaza, Letre Road, Barangay Tonsuya.

But just as they were about to leave, three gunmen approached them and one of the men repeatedly shot Nierras.

The police said the killers apparently made sure that the victim was dead.

The three men then immediately fled toward Damata Street.

They were rushed to the Tondo Medical Center, where Nierras was declared dead on arrival.

A member of the Northern Police District Investigation Division said Nierras could have been slain over a land dispute.

However, they were also looking into possible rivalry with another urban poor group in their area.

Newly appointed Malabon police chief Freddie Panen confirmed that "power rivalry or personal grudge" were among possible motives in the killing.

Another police officer added that Nierras' attackers could be hired killers judging by the manner the ambush was done.

Several months ago, a brother of Nierras was also killed by still unidentified men.

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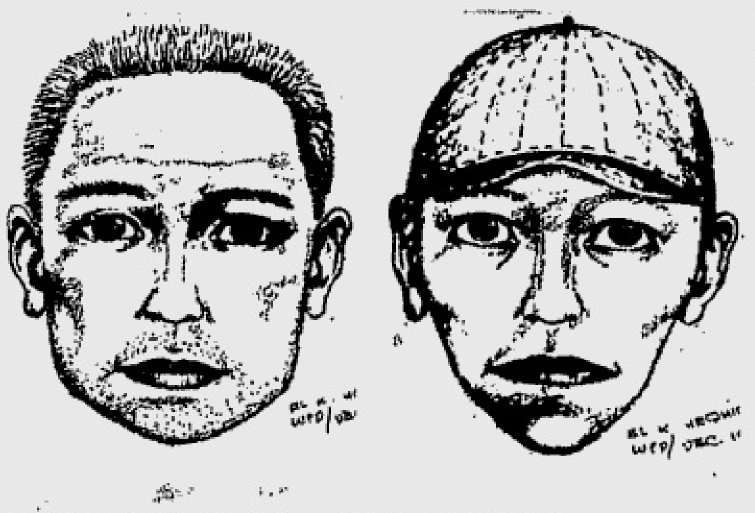

ARTIST'S sketch of the killers of a Taiwanese tourist

Taiwanese tourist killed by gang preying on aliens

By Leila B. Salaverria

THE TAIWANESE tourist slain in Manila early Thursday morning was victimized by a gang of robbers that preyed on foreigners, the Western Police District disclosed yesterday.

Western Police District homicide section chief Sr. Insp. Alejandro Yanquiling revealed this yesterday after they arrested two alleged accomplices of the killers of Wen Hua Yang during a jeepney robbery.

Arrested suspects Jaizon Cubos, 18, a member of the Bahala na Gang, and Dominador Reyes, 32, a Sigue-Sigue Sputnik gang member, identified the slay suspects as Mark Guiller Samson and a certain Jojo.

Samson was described as about 23 or 24 years old, 5'6" to 5'7" tall, muscular and weighing 150 to 160 pounds.

Jojo was described as about 24 or 25 years old, 5'2" to 5'3" tall, dark-complexioned and weighing 100 to 105 pounds.

The police released artist's sketches of Samson and Jojo.

Cubos and Reyes were not with Samson and Jojo during the incident but allegedly confessed knowledge of the robbery.

According to Yanquiling, the gang's modus operandi was for some members to loiter outside cafes and karaoke bars to spot potential victims.

Once prospects were identified, the "spotters" would send text messages to the "strikers" who would follow and rob the intended victims.

The suspects hide their guns in backpacks to avoid suspicion.

DoT gets ₱251M for walls

By Jerome Aning

THE ONGOING restoration of the historic walls of Intramuros got a boost when the government secured a P251-million grant from the Japanese government.

The Japanese government will give the Department of Tourism the grant for the reconstruction of the Maestranza Curtain Wall, which would cost P426 million.

The rest of the funds would be provided by the government, said DOT Secretary Richard Gordon.

In welcoming the aid, the secretary said, "When we started revitalizing Intramuros, we envisioned the restoration of its walls as a way for our people to have a glimpse of their past."

The Maestranza Curtain Wall once comprised the northern portion of Intramuros, by the southern banks of the Pasig River.

Roco and the wife-battery bill

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

IF YOU look at former senator and education secretary Raul Roco, you won't believe that he's capable of violence. He has a tame face, he looks scholarly, and he projects an aura of kindness.

Such looks deceive: If you ask the people at the airport check-in counters, they'll tell you Roco is overbearing and arrogant.

A Philippine Airlines check-in counter clerk told me Roco scolded her and her fellow employees when they failed to attend to him immediately because they were busy attending to other passengers. "*Akala mo siya ang may-ari ng PAL* (You'd think he owned PAL)," the clerk said.

If Roco acts like that when he's not yet the President, how much more when he's already there?

***

I've had a taste of Roco's arrogance when he was senator and education secretary.

He never returned my calls. He never wanted to be interviewed. When he was education secretary, I wanted to talk to him about complaints I received on my public service program, "Isumbong mo kay Tulfo." The complaints concerned the abuses committed by some teachers on their students.

Always, Roco's secretary said he was too busy to be interviewed. His secretary even said not to waste his time on trivial matters. Complaints from abused pupils trivial?

***

President Macapagal-Arroyo's losing sleep over the plan of Bishop Eddie Villanueva to run for president is unfounded.

Just because Villanueva heads the seven-million strong (the figure could even be bloated) Jesus is Lord (JIL) Church doesn't mean that he's a strong candidate.

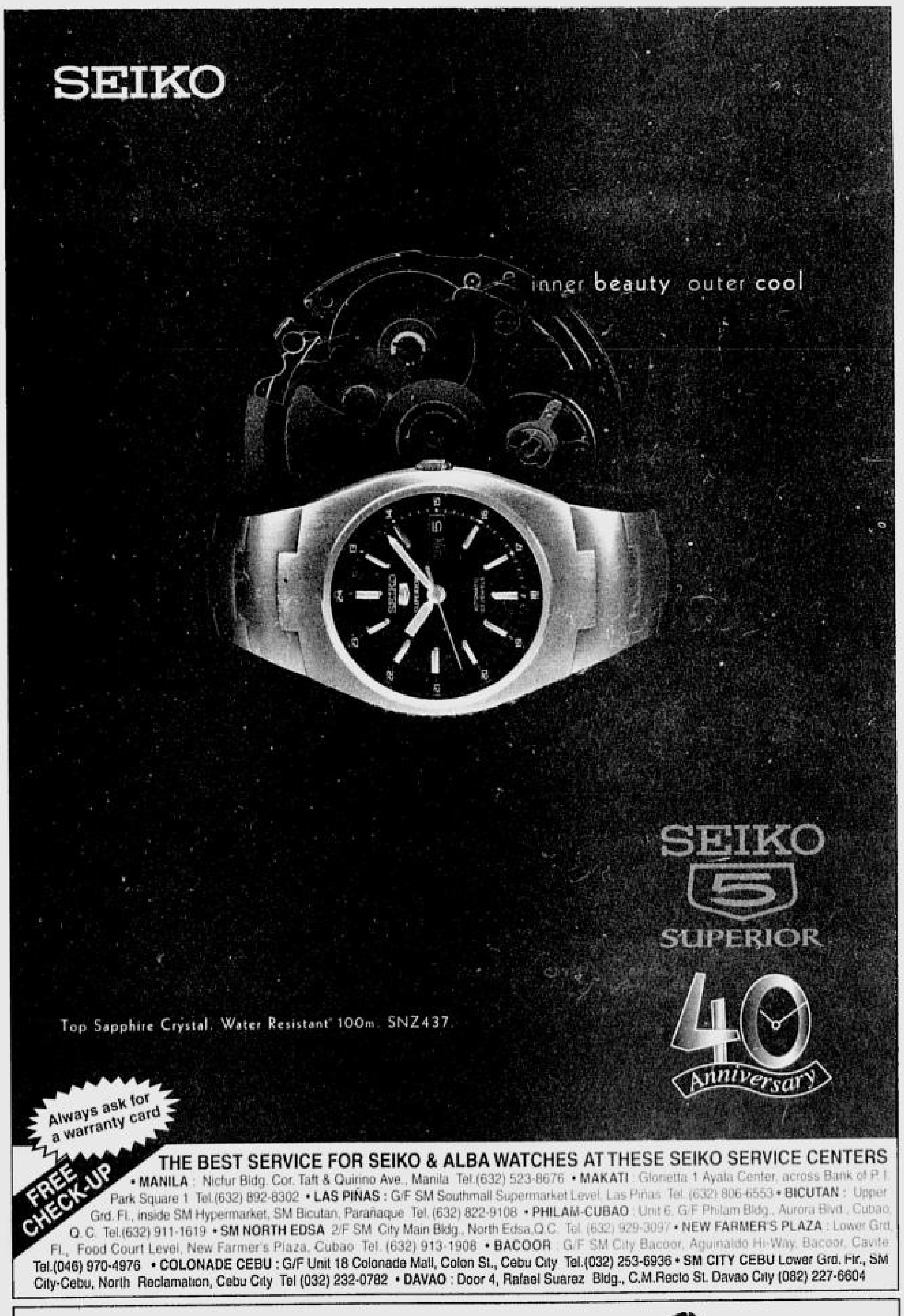
Villanueva probably turned off many of his followers when he announced his presidential ambition.

***

Filipinos don't want their church leaders to directly take part in politics. They may follow the sermons of their church leaders, but they can't be dictated upon when it comes to choosing their elective officials.

Jaime Cardinal Sin, former Manila archbishop, found this out to his chagrin. Sin had asked his flock not to vote for certain candidates. But instead of losing, the candidates that the prelate campaigned against won overwhelmingly.

Villanueva will find this out for himself if he pursues his stupid dream. Many in his church, turned off by his running, will reject him. They might even abandon the JIL church and join other religions or cults.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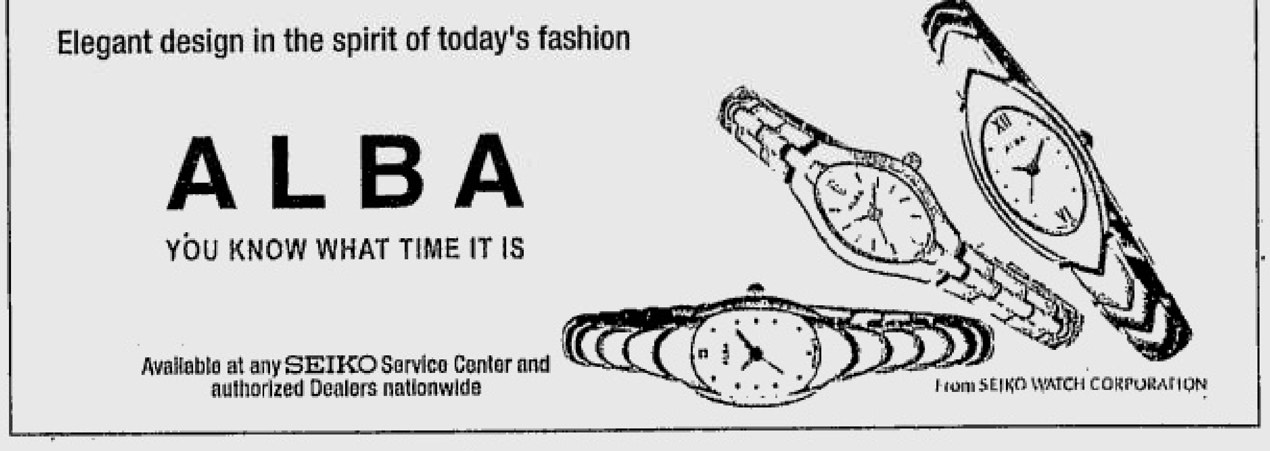
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PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo and First Gent Mike Arroyo among champions and heroes. Flanking them are PSC chair Eric Buhain and POC president Cito Dayrit. VAL HANDUMON

Proud President gives P12M to Vietnam Games medalists

By Marc Anthony Reyes

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday called Filipino medal winners in the Vietnam Southeast Asian Games world class and gifted them with an incentive totaling P12 million.

Arriving late for the athletes' courtesy call on her, the President promptly announced cash incentives rewarding every gold medal with P100,000, silver P50,000 and bronze P10,000.

"You are my world-class athletes," said the President. "You don't know how much you have made us proud to be Filipinos."

The Philippines won 48 gold medals and finished fourth, better than the 31-gold output and fifth-place finish in 2001.

First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo promised to make Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. release funds

PROUD/ A22

PBA acts to rescind NBN deal

Pro league may put up own TV production

By June Navarro

AFTER failing to get a square deal from NBN-4, its broadcast partner, the Philippine Basketball Association is now thinking of putting up a television production of its own.

CABALAN

The idea cropped up after the PBA Board of Governors has moved to rescind its contract with government-run station National Broadcasting Network on the television coverage of the games.

. PBA chairman Jun Cabalan yesterday sent a letter to NBN-4 officials, asking for the cancellation of the three-year television agreement with the network and its partner, IBC-13, which failed to come across with their monetary obligations to the league.

NBN-4 was supposed to shell out P200 million as payment for the exclusive television rights of the PBA for 2003 but came up with only P56 million as NBN officials cited heavy losses in terms of advertising and marketing.

NBN-4 secured the exclusive broadcast rights of the PBA after winning the bidding war against a consortium led by Bobong Velez and Viva-Vintage to the tune of P670 million until the 2005 season.

NBN-4 has until Dec. 31 to respond to the PBA's request but league insiders said the annulment of the contract, the most lucrative in local basketball history in terms of television exposure, is already a foregone conclusion.

"For so long the PBA wanted to control its destiny but the unexpected turn of events prevented the league from putting up an in-house TV outfit. This will now give the PBA a chance to attain its ultimate goal," said a high-ranking PBA official.

But while the PBA is hell-bent on building a television production it can call its own, pro league bigwigs are also considering other viable options for next year's broadcast coverage.

The PBA official, who requested anonymity, told the INQUIRER that, aside from a total in-house television outfit, contracting another network or securing a co-production with another broadcast partner remain as possible options.

Jemah Television and Solar Sports are being considered as possible replacements for the NBN-IBC consortium.

Jemah Television covered the just-concluded Southeast Asian Games in Vietnam, while Solar Sports is known for bringing almost all of the NBA games live on Filipino television.

The NBN-IBC tandem offered several innovations on the television coverage of the games but problems plagued the consortium beginning with the cancellation of Manila Bank's letter of credit.

Manila Bank officials claimed the LC, issued to the league to back up NBN-4's commitment, was inoperative since the government station failed to come up with the necessary requirements to secure it.

The PBA, which claims that the LC is irrevocable, is now contemplating filing a case against Manila Bank after seeking legal opinion from the Bangko Sentral.

SPORTS TV

Compiled by
Lorenzo Manguiat

BASKETBALL: NBA Greatest Games-Knicks vs Nets, Game 3, 1994 Eastern First Round; 9 a.m.; Solar Sports—It's the "Battle of Hudson Bay" as New York takes on New Jersey.

NBA-Pistons vs Pacers; 9 a.m. (r-9 p.m.); ESPN; Nuggets vs Lakers; 11:30 a.m. (r- 8 p.m.); Solar Sports —The Central Division's top two squads tangle as Denver takes on Shaq and Los Angeles.

BILLIARDS: US 9-Ball; 10:30 p.m.; Solar Sports—It's an All-American battle as Jeremy Jones clashes with Keith McReady.

BADMINTON: Hong Kong Badminton Open 2003; 5 p.m.; Solar Sports—The best badminton players gather in the former crown colony.

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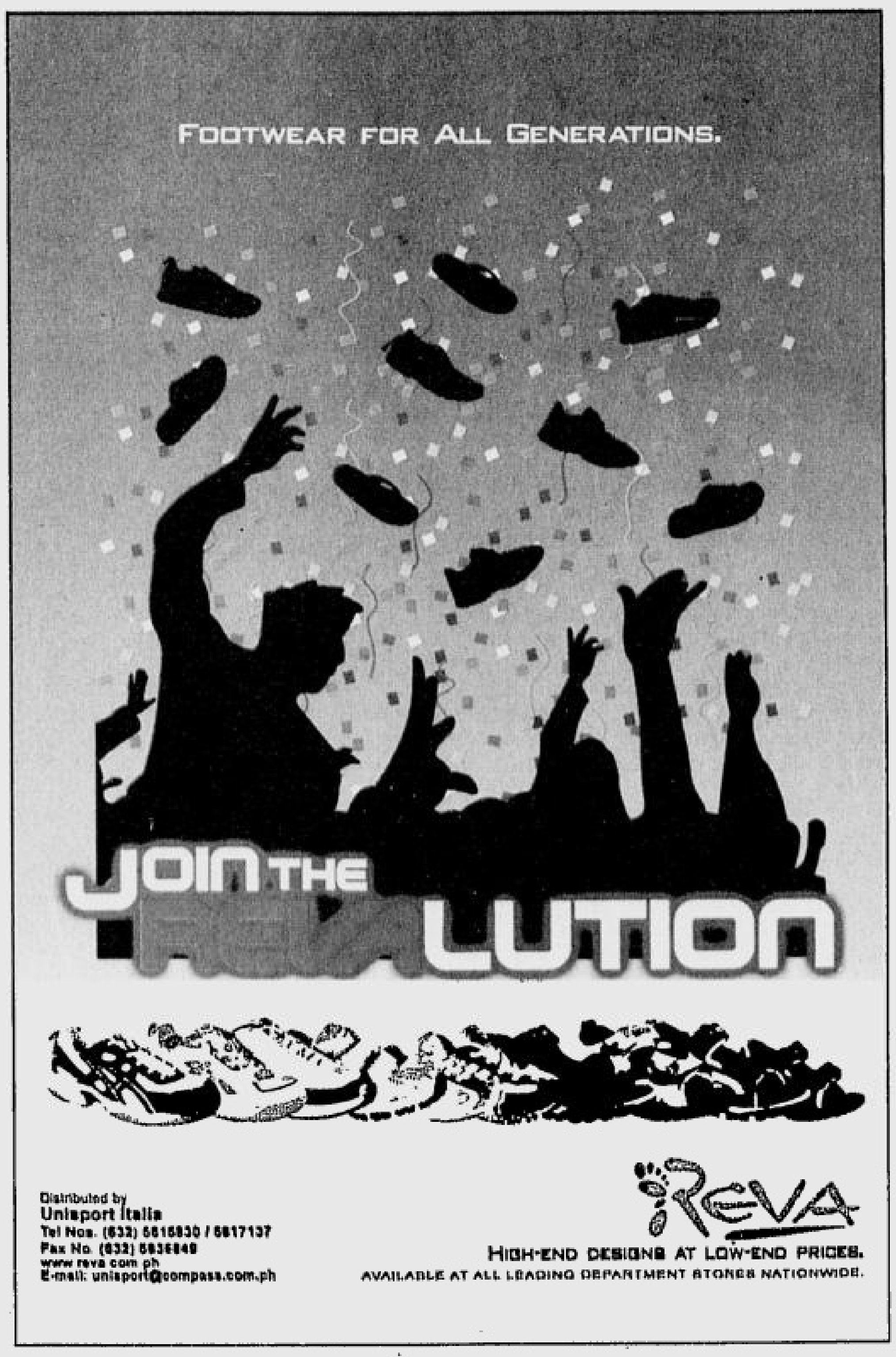
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THE PRESIDENT greets wushu's Willy Wang, one of the four Filipino multiple-gold medalists in the SEAG. Looking on (from left) are wrestler Marcus Valda (2 golds) and chess IM Mark Paragua (3 golds). The other double-gold medalist is diver Rexel Fabriga. VAL HANDUMON

Proud President gives ₱12M to medalists

From page A21

for the athletes' incentives before Christmas amid the applause of the SEAG delegation members at the Heroes' Hall.

The rites were participated in by national athletes, national sports association heads and officials of the Philippine Sports Commission and the Philippine Olympic Committee.

PSC chair Eric Buhain hauled the national athletes in five buses that left the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex before noon.

Top individual performers for the Philippines were youthful chess master Mark Paragua with three gold medals and wrestler Marcus Valda, diver Rexel Fabriga, world wushu champion Willie Wang with two gold medals each.

"Thank you for bringing honor to the Philippines," Ms Macapagal said. "Thank you for the fourth place [finish], and thank you for the country's haul of medals in the Southeast Asian Games."

The medalists presented to the President, Mr. Arroyo and the prime movers behind the First Gentleman Foundation's Gintong Medalya May Laban Tayo program their accomplishment in the games.

"The most important natural resource of the Philippines is its skilled people, and you have shown in a world stage your skills as athletes," the President said.

The athletes were also accompanied to Malacañang by Philippine Olympic Committee president Celso Dayrit, PSC commissioners Leon Montemayor, Mike Barredo and Antonio de Luna; International Olympic Committee representative Frank Elizalde, and heads and officials of the various national sports associations (NSAs).

Buhain was as happy as the First Couple.

"Forty-eight times *na tinugtog ang* 'Lupang Hinirang,'" he said. "Forty-eight times na *itinaas ang ating bandila, at* 48 times *na nagain natin ang respeto ng ating mga* Southeast Asian neighbors."

He said the accomplishment in Vietnam is just the beginning.

"*Ang* goal *natin* for 2005 is to finish No. 1," Buhain said.

The Philippines will host the SEAG in 2005. It has hosted the biennial event twice, in 1981 and in 1991, when the country missed the overall championship by a mere gold medal to Indonesia with 91.

Welcoat seeks vengeful win vs Fash Liquid

REVENGE is in Welcoat's mind when it takes on Fash Liquid Detergent today in the PBL Platinum Cup at the San Juan gym.

"It will be a fitting Christmas gift for me," said Welcoat coach Leo Austria who is bent on avenging the Paint Masters' 65-61 loss to the Liquid Powers in the first round.

"The boys are also very eager to redeem themselves and I'm sure that is all the motivation they need."

Welcoat and Fash collide at 4 p.m. after the 2 o'clock encounter between tailenders Viva Mineral Water-FEU and ICTSI-La Salle.

The Paint Masters are given more an even chance to get back at the Liquid Powers considering that they boast of the core of the national team that retained the Southeast Asian Games cage championship recently.

Nationals James Yap, Ervin Sotto and Marc Pingris are expected to be at the forefront of the Paint Masters' revengeful campaign.

But the Liquid Powers have aces of their own in Rich Alvarez and Wesley Gonzales, who are also national team mainstays, aside from Niño Gelig and Peter June Simon.

Alvarez is expected to share the spotlight with Yap in a match-up that thrilled fans the first time around. Both are reportedly taking a crack at the PBA next season.

The 6-foot-4 Alvarez scored 18 points and grabbed 10 rebounds in their first outing to overshadow Yap, who was held scoreless in the final five minutes of the game but still ended with 18 points.

Fash struggled after that great win and goes into the rematch with Welcoat at 4-3.

At 7-1, the Paint Masters not only pace the seven-team field, but are also assured of a semifinal slot.

Viva (1-6) and ICTSI (2-7) clash to decide which team stays in the running for a semis berth.

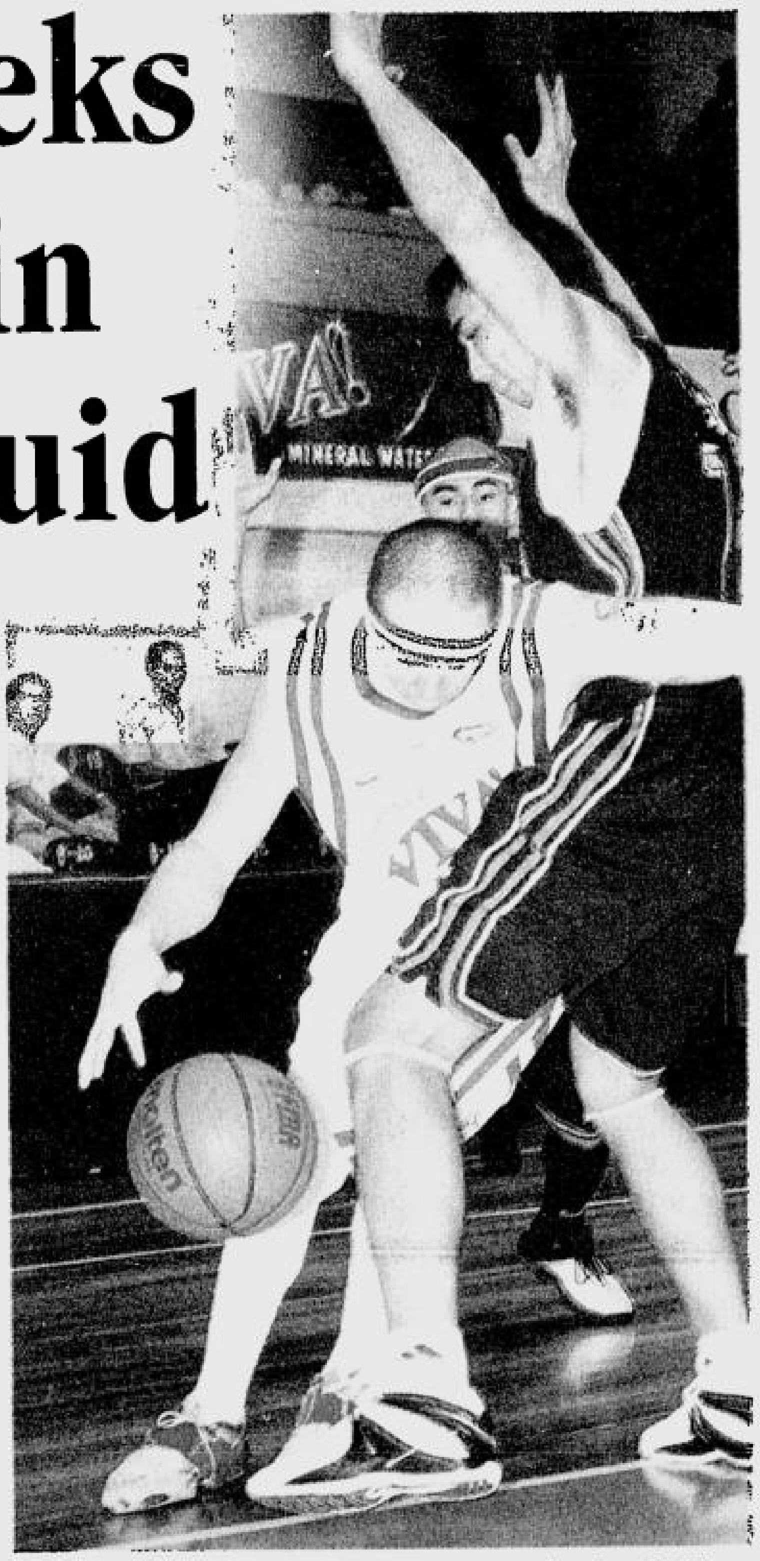
Marc Anthony Reyes

STANDINGS	W	L
Welcoat	7	1
Sunkist	6	4
BluStar	5	4
Montana	4	4
Fash	4	3
ICTSI	2	7
Viva	1	6

GAMES TODAY (San Juan Gym)

2 p.m.—Viva vs ICTSI

4 p.m.—Welcoat vs Fash



SUNNY Margate of Viva Mineral Water drives against Joaquim Thoss of ICTSI during the two teams' game in the first round. Today's losing side will most certainly miss the semis bus. AUGUST DELA CRUZ

SPORTSWATCH

Maco booters gain Coke finals

DAVAO CITY—Compostela Valley's Maco National High trimmed Bukidnon's Holy Cross, 2-1, yesterday to gain the semifinals of the all-Mindanao Coke Go-for-Goal under-16 regional football finals at the Tionko field here. Arjun Neduilan and Binas Minique struck in the 21st and 70th minutes, respectively, to lift Maco to victory. Joey Torino saved Holy Cross from a shutout by scoring in the 86th minute. Host Emar Learning Center also made it to the semifinals via a goal difference after battling Surigao del Norte's Surigao National High to a 3-3 draw. Emar will meet Dipolog's Andres Bonifacio College while South Cotabato's San Lorenzo Ruiz Academy will face Maco in today's semifinal matches starting at 8 a.m. Ryan Yambao knocked in two goals to help the Emar booters in their tight match against Surigao. The champion and runner-up will advance to the national finals slated in February next year.

Andrada Cup listing starts

REGISTRATION for the 15th Andrada Cup slated Jan. 3-9 at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center in Manila is now ongoing. Players who wish to join the Group 2 event may contact Ms. Loida Mallare at Philta at 525-3464 or 523-6415. Deadline for registration is set on Tuesday, Dec. 30 at 12 noon with the draw to follow at 2 p.m. The tournament will be held in honor of Philta president Buddy Andrada. Events on tap are boys' and girls' singles 18, 16, 14, 12 and 10 unisex.

Unique Aquathlon challenge up

WESTFIELDS International School will host the first Angeles City Aquathlon Challenge at 21-2 Friendship Highway, Cut-cut, Angeles City, Sunday. This unique event is being held after the country's hosting of the 2nd Asian Aquathlon Championships held in Boracay. Two divisions are on tap in the trailblazing effort of Wilfredo Cruz, a promising triathlete before he left for Japan to work. Young triathletes below 9 years old will vie in two age categories, namely the 8-to-under-9 class and the 7-and-under bracket. They will run 500 meters, swim 100 meters and run again for 500 meters. Triathletes aged nine to 18 will be clustered into the nine-to-under-12 class and the 12-18 bracket. They will run one kilometer, swim 400 meters and cap it with a 1km run. Sponsored by Casino Filipino, Rep. Francis "Blue Boy" Nepomuceno and Milo, the race starts at 2 p.m. Registration starts from 12 noon. For inquiries, call Wilfredo Cruz at 0927-3784813; telefax is (045) 322-2862 or (045) 887-4966.

Futsal gains big following in RP

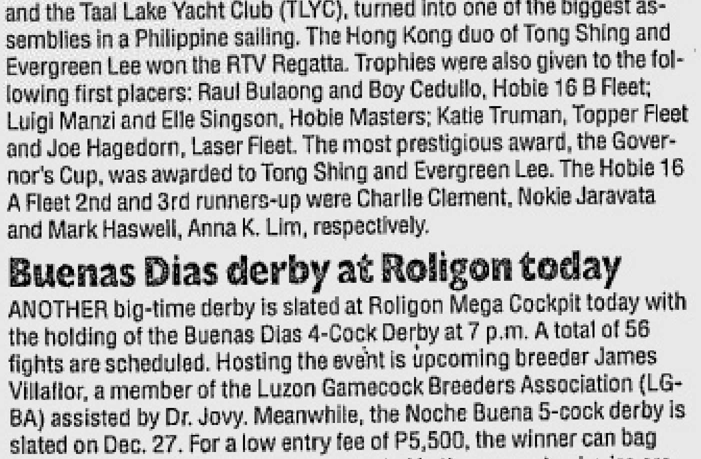
FUTSAL is a game derived from soccer but using five players per side. It is played indoors in a ground the size of a basketball court. Futsal, from the Spanish or Portuguese word for "soccer," FUTbol or FUTebol, and the French or Spanish word for "indoor," SALon or SALa, is now in the Philippines. Last Nov. 21-25, the Philippine Football Federation (PFF) was invited by the Federation Internacional de Football Association (Fifa), led by Futsal chair Victor Beceiro, to send a representative to Bangkok for the planned "Futsal Asia," and to observe the Thailand 5s, that country's first ever international Futsal tournament. In response, PFF Futsal chair Joaquin Preysler sent PFF secretary for Futsal Miguel David, to attend the event and discuss further cooperation of the Philippines. Discussions were held with different national associations, Fifa executives, representatives of ESPN Star Sports (ESS), and the Organizing Committee for the Fifa Futsal World Championship, which will be held in Chinese-Taipei in November 2004. ESPN Star Sports will be airing the Thailand 5s series among Brazil, Thailand, Japan and Russia on Star Sports until Dec. 24.

HK duo top winners in Taal Regatta

THE SAILING season in Taal Lake kicked off recently with the Buena Vista Round Taal Volcano Regatta and Governor's Cup competitions. The two-day event, hosted by Buena Vista Nature Park and Country Club and the Taal Lake Yacht Club (TLYC), turned into one of the biggest assemblies in a Philippine sailing. The Hong Kong duo of Tong Shing and Evergreen Lee won the RTV Regatta. Trophies were also given to the following first placers: Raul Bulaong and Boy Cedullo, Hobie 16 B Fleet; Luigi Manzi and Elle Singson, Hobie Masters; Katie Truman, Topper Fleet and Joe Hagedorn, Laser Fleet. The most prestigious award, the Governor's Cup, was awarded to Tong Shing and Evergreen Lee. The Hobie 16 A Fleet 2nd and 3rd runners-up were Charlie Clement, Nokie Jaravata and Mark Haswell, Anna K. Lim, respectively.

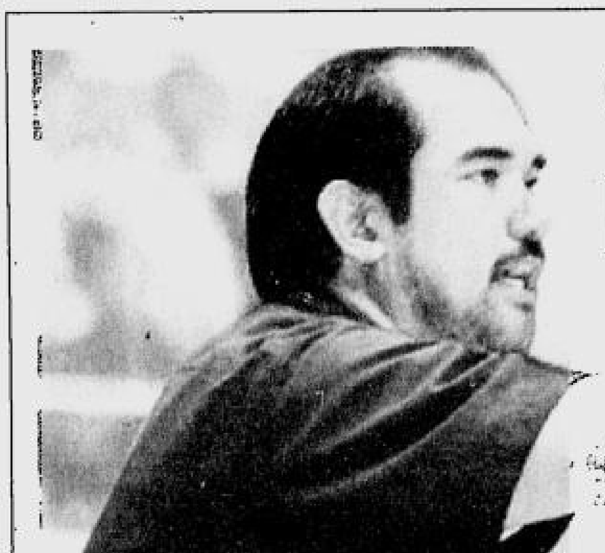
Buenas Dias derby at Roligon today

ANOTHER big-time derby is slated at Roligon Mega Cockpit today with the holding of the Buenas Dias 4-Cock Derby at 7 p.m. A total of 56 fights are scheduled. Hosting the event is upcoming breeder James Villaflor, a member of the Luzon Gamecock Breeders Association (LGBA) assisted by Dr. Jovy. Meanwhile, the Noche Buena 5-cock derby is slated on Dec. 27. For a low entry fee of P5,500, the winner can bag the guaranteed pot of P750,000. Included in the guaranteed prize are the following P50,000 for fastest kill champion and Christmas giveaways to handlers like color TV, DVD player, stereo VCR, gas stove, rice cooker, electric fan, flat iron and noche buena basket. For reservation of cockhouses, interested parties may contact 833-2275 at 833-1638. Preparations are also underway for the Roligon 14th Anniversary 7-Cock Derby on Jan. 31, Feb. 3, 5, 7,10 and 12 with a guaranteed prize of P3.6 million. Entry fee is P11,000.



KING OF FAIRWAYS: Hwang Jae Hun (middle) receives his trophy from Fairways & Bluewaters chair Toti Cariño (fourth from left) for ruling the Bluewater division of the recent Fourth Fairways & Bluewaters Chairman's Cup golf tourney in Boracay. With them are (from left) violinist John Lesaca, Ali Bsaies and F&B GM Geb Bilbao.

Coach Banal leaves his beloved Eagles



TIME TO MOVE ON: Joel Banal. PDI PHOTO

THE COLORFUL Banal-vs-Banal coaching rivalry in the UAAP has come to an unexpected end.

Ateneo University yesterday announced coach "Joel Banal has decided not to renew his contract as head coach of the Blue Ealges."

Banal lost out to younger brother Koy, coach of the Far Eastern University, 2-0, when they clashed in this year's UAAP basketball title series.

The Ateneo announcement said coach Banal had initially expressed willingness to continue coaching the Blue Eagles for another year while handling Talk 'N Text team.

"But after much thought, discussion among all parties concerned, and prayer, we all have come to a consensus that such an arrangement does not do justice to all parties concerned—Ateneo, Talk 'N Text and Joel himself," Fr. Bienvenido Nebres, Ateneo president, said.

Named as new Ateneo coach was Alexander Arespacochaga. His contract, started on Dec. 15, is for three years.

Fr. Nebres said Arespacochaga was appointed first assistant coach to Banal in 2002 and played an important role in winning the championship that year.

Arespachochaga, who played for the Ateneo Blue Eagles team for five years, was appointed head coach of the Ateneo Blue Eaglets upon graduation in 1998 and, in his second and third year as coach, steered the junior team to two consecutive UAAP titles.

Fr. Nebres said they are thankful Joel Banal for assisting in the choice of (his) successor "and for his mentoring and personal example which have influenced many of the players."

Banal coached Ateneo to the UAAP basketball championship last year, thus ending a 14-year title drought.

Shell's Dela Cruz is Sportsman of the Year

FORMULA Shell forward Anthony dela Cruz has been named the first recipient of the First Gentleman Sportsman of the Year—an honor given to the PBA player who contributed immensely to enhance the league's image and strengthen its link to its fans.

The amiable three-year pro was picked from a list of nine players who stood out in the league's numerous outreach programs both in Metro Manila and out of town, and honored with the award created in conjunction with the First Gentleman Foundation of Atty. Mike Arroyo.

He was presented a trophy and a P100,000 check during Monday night's Leo Awards by presidential son Dato Arroyo, who represented his father during the well-attended rites at the Music Museum.

The Fil-Am forward also touched a lot of hearts in an outreach program conducted by the league during a road game in Bohol last October.

"More than anything else, I think Anthony embodies what a PBA player should be—a hardworking cager respected by teammates, fellow players, the media and more importantly the fans," said Commissioner Noli Eala.

A six-man panel made up of representatives from the Office of the Commissioner, carrying station NBN-4 and the First Gentleman Foundation picked the winner based on four criteria: sincerity in participating in the outreach activities; sportsmanship qualities during games; own advocacy projects; and a good image on and off the court.

The other candidates were FedEx stars Vergel Meneses and Jerry Codiñera, Ginebra's Rob Johnson, Alaska's Don Allado, San Miguel Beer's Benjie Paras and Dondon Hontiveros, Sta. Lucia Realty's Marlou Aquino, Red Bull's Lordy Tugade and Coca-Cola's Rudy Hatfield.

ANGELO Que's 68 in the first round cushioned a fat 76 in the second. AFP

DESPITE A 76

Que survives Japan cut

ANGELO Que stumbled with two double-bogeys in a 4-over-par 76 yesterday that pulled him down to 29th place after the second round of the Asia-Japan Okinawa Open that was suspended by darkness at the Southern Links Golf Club in Okinawa, Japan.

It was a roller-coaster ride for Que due to the difficult playing conditions, although he safely made it through the weekend with an even par 144 aggregate.

Although getting two birdies, Que also had two bogeys. He was among the leaders in the first round with a 4-under-par 68.

Hiroshi Goda was the clubhouse leader at 5-under 139 after carding a 73. He was tied with Hirokazu Kuniyoshi who still had three holes to play when the round was stopped.

Although many players still have to complete their rounds, Frankie Miñoza was not expected to make the cut. He scored a 77 for a 147 and was in the group sharing 68th place. Danny Zarate never got to recover from a bad start, scoring another 75 for 150.

Only the top 60 and ties will advance to the last two rounds of the event sanctioned by the Asian PGA and the Japan Tour. *Jong Arcano*

Family sweep by Superals in Young Guns at Legends

STILL NO. 1: Wolen Juan Superal

THE SUPERALS—Wolen Juan, Crystal Faith and Princess—came up with a family sweep in yesterday's second Young Guns at the Legends by winning their respective divisions in contrasting fashion at the Manila Southwoods in Carmona, Cavite.

Wolen Juan, back after a long absence, continued his winning ways with a tournament-best 1-over-par 73 to easily win the boys' division for 11-year-olds, while sisters Princess and Crystal Faith pulled off close victories in the 8 years and under and 12-years-old categories.

US Kids World champion AR Ramos (boys 7 years and below) and Sarawak Chief Minister's Cup titlist Ma. Andrea Legaspi (girls 10 years) also stamped their class to join the roster of winners in the tournament specially designed for kids 12 years and below.

Completing the champions' list are JP de Claro (8 years), Bino dela Paz (9 years), Marcel Puyat (10 years) and John Kier Abdon (12 years) in the boys' division and Nicole Serapio (9 years), Angela Yulo (93) in the girls' side of the 18-hole event sponsored by Smart Communications, Bellevue, Price Smart, Duty Free Phils., Marvin Sports Plaza, Nestlé, Gatorade, International Container Terminal Services Inc., Fil-Estate/Manila Southwoods, SharExchange and Golf Depot.

Event organizer Luigi Tabuena handed out trophies and raffled off Smart phones as well as golf items during the awarding ceremonies. He also announced that the Young Guns will go international in its third edition next year.

"We saw a lot of improvement from last year's batch and we're very happy with the way things turned out," Tabuena said.

Jungolfers in the 8 years and under played only for 9 holes while the rest played for 18 holes.

Meanwhile, jungolfers will see action in the Nike Christmas Tournament at Riviera on Monday, Dec. 22, then the Alabang Invitational the next day, Dec. 23.

The winners:

Boys (7 below—39 AR Ramos, 40 Marc Anthony Arevalo, 48 Jason Allen Buen; **8 years**—35 JP de Claro, 38 JR Gonzales, 43 Polo Reyes; **9 years**—74 Bino dela Paz, 78 Miguel Tabuena, Kenneth Angala; **10 years**—82 Marcel Puyat, 89 Don Martin Fernandez, 92 James Ricohermoso; **11 years**—73 Wolen Superal, 80 Anthony See, 89 Juan Miguel Arevalo; **12 years**—78 John Kier Abdon, 83 Bingbong San Luis, 87 Moshee Baldo)

Girls (**8 below**—44 Princess Superal, 45 Andie Unson, 51 Felicia Medalla; **9 years**—78 Nicole Serapio (won by countback), 78 C. Potenciano, 91 Summi Huang; **10 years**—85 Maan Legaspi, 92 Katya dela Cruz, 98 Charlene Abalos; **11 years**—93 Angela Yulo, 94 Angelika Datingaling; **12 years**—78 Crystal Faith Superal, 80 Mia Piccio, 85 Misha Solano).

Bata protege faces Gabica in 9-Ball challenge today

A PROTEGE of the legendary Efren "Bata" Reyes will try to stop back-to-back Tokyo 9-Ball Open champion Antonio "Gaga" Gabica as the "Search for the Tanduay No. 1 Billiards Player" resumes today at the Robinson's Malls.

Nestor Ocampo, 23, of Pampanga who emerged champion of the 2002 Bata Reyes Cup organized by the former world champion himself, will try to stop Gabica's bid to extend his stay as featured cue artist for the fifth week of this event conceptualized by Tanduay advertising manager Larry Li and supported by Tanduay Marketing manager Andres Co.

Just like Reyes, the budding Ocampo also dreams of making it big in the international scene.

"*Nagpapasalamat din ako ke* Bata Reyes *dahil sa malaking inspirasyon na binigay sa akin. Yun din ang naging daan para maglakas loob akong sumali dito sa* Tanduay search. *Mas malaking* exposure *ito para lalong mahasa ang galing ko sa bilyar*," said Ocampo.

The match, sponsored by Tanduay Rhum, Robinson's Malls and Rommel's billiards, will be aired over the National Broadcasting Network from 8-9 tonight with hosts Danny Romero and Recah Trinidad.

Ocampo must win twice in order to unseat Gabica. If successful, he would be challenged by new budding talents the following week.

The overall champion this year gets sponsorship from Tanduay and will carry the national colors in prestigious international competitions.

The unique series, aimed at encouraging talented unknowns, is geared at uplifting billiards as a major television spectacle in the country.

Interested parties may inquire with the Corporate Billiards League secretariat at 09189219934 or log on at www.corporatebilliardsleague@yahoo.com.

Watch...Search for Tanduay The No. 1 Billiard Player Every Saturday on NBN 4, 8-9 PM

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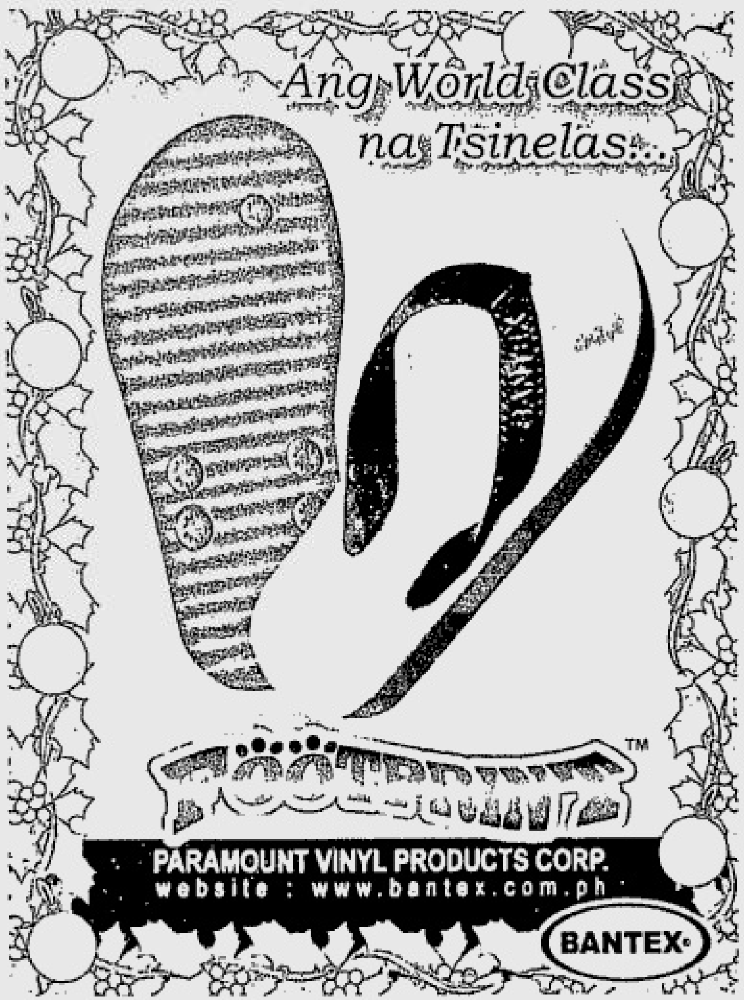

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All eyes on Gorres in Subic fight fiesta

By Salven L. Lagumbay, *Contributor*

SUBIC—No title will be at stake when top-ranked RP flyweight Z "The Dream" Gorres clashes with Philippine super flyweight king Eric Barcelona but their ten-round fight is expected to steal the show from the Bobby Pacquiao-Renato Inal national junior lightweight championship bout at the Subic Metropolitan Gymnasium here tonight.

Noel Sungahid figures in a 12-round tiff for the interim RP bantam crown against No. 2 Joel Bauya in another explosive matchup.

Pacquiao, reigning RP 130-lbs king, is the younger brother of IBF super bantamweight champion Manny Pacquiao.

Gorres weighed 116.75 lbs while Barcelona came in at 116.6 lbs during yesterday's official weigh-in at the Games and Amusements Board office in Makati City.

Sungahid came in at an exact 118 lbs while Bauya was 117 lbs for their bantamweight division war.

Gorres hopes to avenge the loss of his stablemate, Sherwin Paro, at the hands of Barcelona last month when the two fought for the RP superfly title.

If victorious, the talented Gorres, now handled by lawyer-sportsman Rudy Salud, is expected to figure in a high-profile fight soon.

Sungahid, meanwhile, is seeing action after sensational wins in Indonesia.

He's expected to have his hands full against the power-punching Bauya of the Emil Romano Stable.

Spring-San Pablo 7 Lakers vow better future stint

AFTER a fiery comeback that saw Spring Cooking Oil-San Pablo finish third in the recent Panasonic-National Basketball League Regional Cup tournament, team supporters Nathaniel "Tac" Padilla and Mayor Florante Aquino have vowed to strengthen the team further and do better in the next conference.

"We're happy that despite a shaky start, the team still managed to emerge third best in the league (behind champion Compak Shineway -Ozamiz and M. Lhuillier Kwarta Padala-Cebu). But we look forward to a better stint in the future," said San Pablo City Mayor Aquino.

"Our next goal is to win the title," added shooting champ Padilla.

The 7 Lakers toppled the Ilocos Sur Snipers, 94-86, in their sudden-death match just before the Ozamiz cagers nosed out the Cebuanos, 76-75, to keep the crown.

"We're elated," said Padilla. "It's a big honor to emerge as the top team from Luzon. It's worth the support we've given."

Problems hounded the 7 Lakers at the start since new head coach Ted Magno had picked the players only two weeks before the games began. After suffering two defeats, Magno began recruiting veteran players like slotman Mel Crisostomo.

After beating Grachiya-Adamson, 73-60, the 7 Lakers began moving up until they reached the semis and then beat the Snipers to clinch third.

"No doubt, Ozamiz and Cebu have stronger, intact lineups. But watch us the next time around," warned Aquino and Padilla.

PADILLA: We'll be back.

Joson top RP finisher in Asian F-3

DENSO-HANJIN-JF3 Racing's Richard Joson emerged as the top Filipino finisher in the final round of the recent Asian Formula 3 Championship at the Batangas Racing Circuit.

Bucking suspension problems, Joson managed a second-place finish by a mere second behind Australian driver Christian Jones.

Joson's finish capped his second-place standing in the Driver's Championship.

Empire King out to stamp his class anew

AFTER showing up his rivals in three consecutive top-money events, Empire King sets out to crown himself as the year's undisputed two-year-old champion when he competes in the 2003 Philracom Juvenile Championship Race tomorrow at the Santa Ana Park.

Handily winning the Juvenile Colt titles in the Philtobo Mitra Cup, Marho Breeders' Cup and the Wind Blown Racefest, the impressive colt by Perfect Halo (USA) out of Carta Nueve (NZ) is on a five-race winning streak.

He looks headed for a sweep of the year's Juvenile Stakes Series under the guidance of rising star jockey Jeffrey Ladiana.

Owned by businessman David Lee and trained by Ernesto Roxas, Empire King will be challenged in the 1,600-meter race by 11 other crack two-year-olds including archrival Don Paolo, Speed O'War, Cover Girl, Toril, Flying Jordan, Nothing to Declare, Shock and Awe, Terminator, Vindicated, Batangas Force and Banana Split.

Lending support to the P1.67-million main event, sponsored by the Philippine Racing Commission, are four other featured races—the P500,000 "Alay sa Pangulo" Invitational Race, the P400,000 Philracom Juvenile Hopeful Stakes and two Imported Invitational Races.

Fourteen races are on tap today at the Santa Ana, while 15 races are lined up for tomorrow.

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Hot Garnett lifts Wolves past Mavs

MINNEAPOLIS—Kevin Garnett had 35 points, 10 assists and 10 rebounds for his first triple-double of the season Thursday to help the Minnesota Timberwolves hold off the Dallas Mavericks, 114-109, for their fourth straight victory.

Sam Cassell added 26 points, and Gary Trent had a season-high 18 points and 12 rebounds for Minnesota.

"It's a dogfight in this division—we are just trying to scratch and claw our way through it," said Cassell.

Steve Nash had nine of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, and Antawn Jamison had 14 of his 22 in the final period for the Mavericks, who dropped to 3-9 on the road.

"A lot of guys played well, but the biggest surprise was Gary," coach Flip Saunders said. "It was the best game he had this year."

Kings 101, Hornets 90

In New Orleans, Brad Miller had 21 points, 14 rebounds and nine assists for Sacramento.

Mike Bibby added 19 points, Bobby Jackson had 18 and Peja Stojakovic 17 for the Kings.

Baron Davis led New Orleans with 23 points. The Hornets have lost three straight, all by double-digit margins.

In Portland, Oregon, Zach Randolph had 29 points and 20 rebounds to lead Portland past Phoenix.

Damon Stoudamire and Rasheed Wallace each added 15 points for the Trail Blazers. Shawn Marion had 20 points for the Suns.

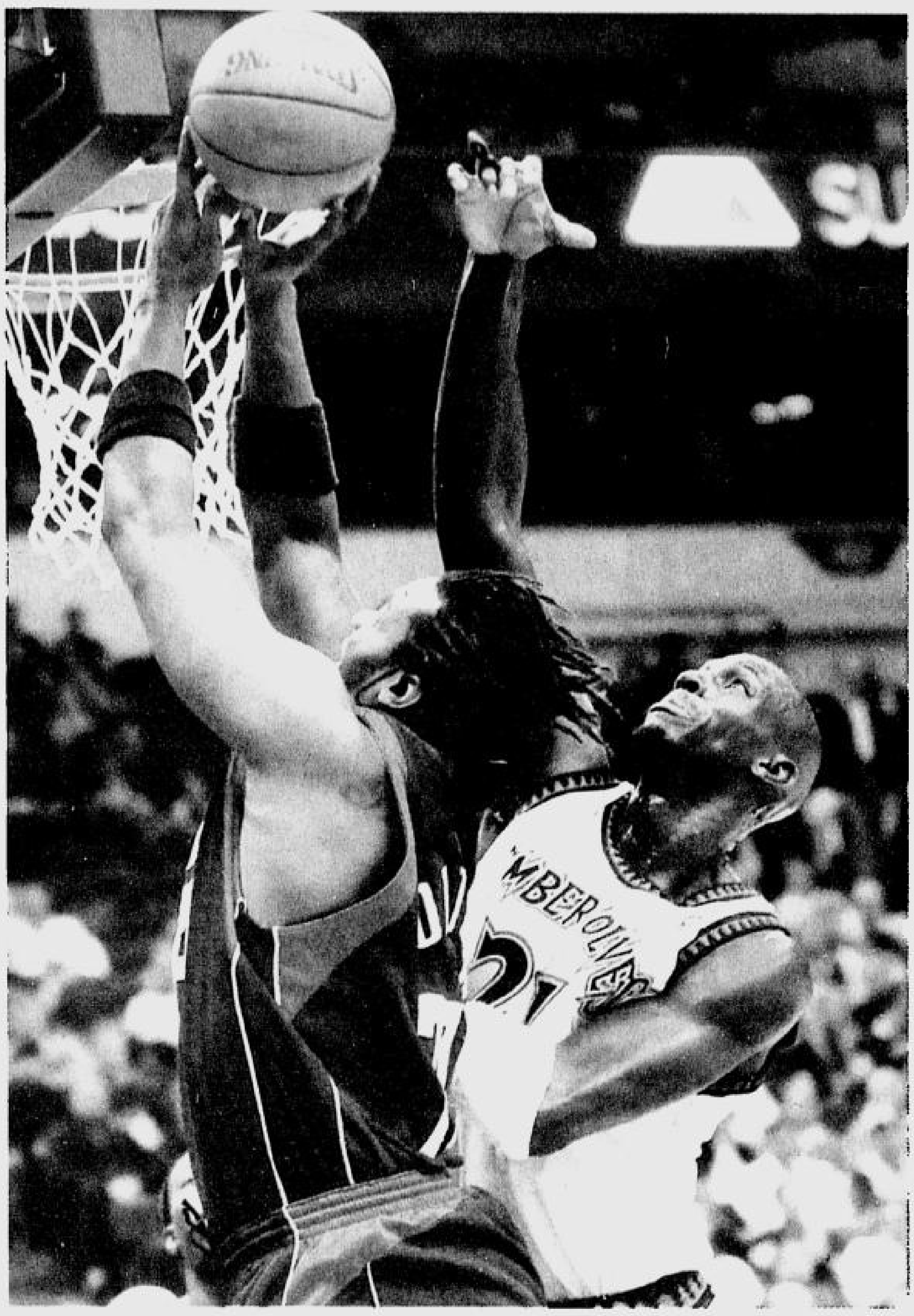
Mourning

Meanwhile, less than a month after retiring from the NBA with a kidney disease, former New Jersey Nets center Alonzo Mourning will undergo kidney transplant surgery Friday in New York, his agent said.

Mourning will receive the kidney from an unidentified family member, agent Jeff Wechsler said Thursday. The former All-Star had received dozens of offers from prospective donors around the country following the announcement last month that he needed a transplant.

"Alonzo will receive his kidney from a family member and wants to thank all those who offered to donate a kidney to him for their generosity," Wechsler said in a prepared statement. "He appreciates all the wellwishes and encouragement from fans and asks that the public respect his privacy."

Mourning, 33, announced his retirement from the Nets on Nov. 24 because of complications from focal segmental glomerulosclerosis. He was diagnosed with the disease before the 2000-2001 NBA season when he was with the Miami Heat. *AP*



KEVIN Garnett of Minnesota is set to reject a shot by Mavericks forward Danny Fortson. AP

Two skiers stripped of Olympic gold medals

LAUSANNE, Switzerland—Cross-country skiers Olga Danilova of Russia and Johann Muehlegg of Spain were stripped of Olympic gold medals Thursday by the Court of Arbitration for Sport for failing drug tests.

Muehlegg earlier had to give up another gold medal from the 2002 Games and Danilova was disqualified from a race because they tested positive for the banned endurance-boosting substance darbepoetin.

The International Olympic Committee allowed the skiers to keep medals from earlier victories at Salt Lake City, though, because they passed drug tests after those events.

Third to first

But the Court of Arbitration for Sport overruled that.

So Danilova's gold medal from the 5-kilometer pursuit event goes to Beckie Scott of Canada. Scott actually crossed the finish line third in Salt Lake City, but she was moved up to second place when original silver medalist Larissa Lazutina was punished because of a failed drug test.

"This is so important for sports and for history. This is a precedent-setting moment that the little guy won out finally and the right thing was done," Scott, speaking from Austria, told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. "So I'm thrilled in many different respects that this went the way it did."

No immediate reaction was available from Danilova.

Muehlegg now must relinquish gold medals from the 10-km combined pursuit to Norwegians Thomas Alsgaard and Frode Estil—who previously shared the silver after tying for second place—and from the 30-km freestyle to Austrian Christian Hoffmann.

Changes

In the pursuit, the bronze goes to Per Elofsson of Sweden, while in the 30K freestyle, Mikhail Botvinov of Austria gets the silver and Kirsten Skjeldal the bronze.

In a telephone interview, Toti Rossello, spokesman for the Spanish Winter Sports Federation, told The Associated Press the organization had not been in contact with Muehlegg since May.

"When Muehlegg was with us he trained completely separately from the rest of the team. He was given total freedom, and he abused it," Rossello said. "The previous president (Luis Algar) got it wrong." *AP*

LeBron's shoes out in market

BEAVERTON, Oregon—At school, LeBron James wore the signature shoe of his idol, Michael Jordan. Now fans can wear James' shoe.

Nike launches the product endorsed by the Cleveland Cavaliers rookie Saturday, and store managers nationwide are expecting teenagers to sleep outside — just as they did for debuts of the Air Jordan line.

James' shoe launches in 2,225 stores across the US, starting at 12:01 a.m. Saturday when New York's Foot Action opens its doors.

"You could call it the Harry Potter of sneakers," said Jamelah Leddy, a sportswear analyst with McAdams Wright Ragen Inc. in Seattle.

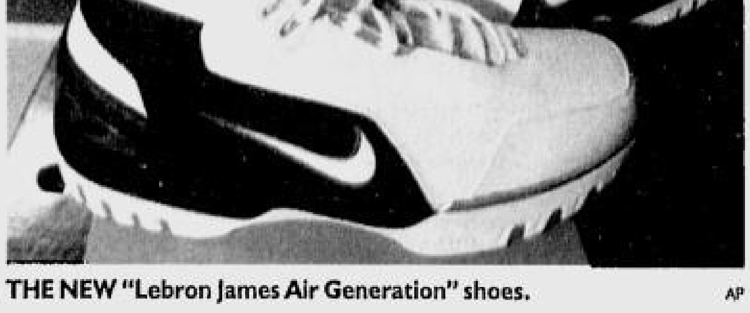
The hype has spilled from TV talk shows into websites, including e-Bay, where 54 of the embargoed $110 pairs are selling and bids approachd $200. In November, when Portland's Niketown offered a limited edition of the shoe, the sneaker sold in 18 minutes, leaving a line of teens still waiting outside.

What's the appeal? "Obviously, it's LeBron," 15-year-old Peter Koehler explained. "People will buy Jordan even if they don't like the way it looks—because it's Jordan."

It's an insight clear to those who labor behind the locked doors of Nike's "Innovation Kitchen" in Portland. In a room stuffed with easels, designers struggled to graft James' star appeal onto a sneaker.

"This is a watershed project," said Tinkle Hatfield, Nike's chief designer, who created the Air Jordan prototype two decades ago. "We're taking everything we learned and applying it."

Under Hatfield's direction, each Air Jordan prototype shoe mirrored a different aspect of his personality. *AP*



THE NEW "Lebron James Air Generation" shoes. AP

Bryant to attend court hearing

EAGLE, Colorado—Medical records and patient confidentiality will be at the heart of Kobe Bryant's hearing Friday, when key evidence will be discussed in detail for the first time before the trial judge.

The NBA star's lawyers will argue they should be allowed to introduce the records of the woman accusing him of rape. They also will try to show mental problems might have affected her perception of what happened in a hotel room with Bryant last June.

Sealed

The defense witness list is sealed, but prosecutors have confirmed the woman's mother was subpoenaed to appear. At least one friend also has been subpoenaed.

An attorney for the woman has asked the judge to close the courtroom for any testimony regarding her medical history. State District Judge Terry Ruckriegle has not ruled on the request.

Unsure

Bryant, a 25-year-old guard for the Los Angeles Lakers, faces four years to life in prison or 20 years to life on probation if convicted of felony sexual assault. Bryant, who has said the sex was consensual, will be at the hearing. The Lakers play at home Friday night, though Bryant was unsure if he will back in time for the game.

"I don't know, I don't know, I don't know," Bryant said at practice Thursday. "We'll see how long it takes."

Analysts said the defense needs to do everything it can to undermine the woman's credibility at trial.

"The prosecution is desperate to say in closing, 'Why would this woman make it up?' All the defense is doing is saying, 'Judge, don't tie our hands behind our back, we want to give an answer,'" said Denver attorney Larry Pozner, former president of the Colorado Criminal Defense Bar.

'Danger to herself'

Among the records the defense wants to use are documents from the North Colorado Medical Center in Greeley, where authorities brought the 19-year-old woman in February after determining she was a "danger to herself."

Defense lawyers Pamela Mackey and Hal Haddon have argued the woman tried to kill herself in February and again in May to get her ex-boyfriend's attention. They also say she had been prescribed an anti-psychotic drug.

The defense also wants access to notes taken during an interview of the woman by a worker for a rape victim's advocacy group. On Thursday, the judge granted a request for a hearing on whether those records can be released to the defense. He did not set a date for the hearing.

Bryant's attorneys could have a hard time obtaining the medical records: Under a 2002 Colorado Supreme Court decision, the records cannot even be reviewed by a judge in private unless the patient consents.

Waived

In the Bryant case, the woman has not allowed the hospital to release any records.

In a court filing Thursday, Mackey said the woman discussed her medical condition and medications with a detective. *AP*

RODDICK

Roddick confirms Athens Olympiad stint

OAKLAND, Calif.—Andy Roddick will play in the Olympic tennis tournament this summer.

"Athens 2004—we're definitely going," Roddick's coach, Brad Gilbert, said Thursday.

The top-ranked Roddick is eligible for the Summer Games because he plays in Davis Cup competition.

The Olympic Games are scheduled for Aug. 15-22, ending eight days before the start of the US Open, where Roddick will defend his first major title.

Roddick hired Gilbert, who previously coached Andre Agassi, after he suffered a first-round loss in the French Open this year. With Gilbert, Roddick reached the Wimbledon semifinals, won the US Open and rose to No. 1 in the rankings.

Gilbert, who spoke at an Oakland Athletics' fund-raiser, is enthusiastic about the Olympics.

"I was with Andre when he won gold in '96 in Atlanta, and I played on the team in Seoul in '88," Gilbert said. "It was a great experience." *AP*

Vietnam Para Games up tomorrow

HANOI— Vietnam will host the second ASEAN Para Games from Sunday, eight days after the closing ceremony of the Southeast Asian Games.

More than 700 athletes from the 10 Asean countries and East Timor are expected to participate in the competition.

Medals will be distributed in athletics, swimming, table-tennis, badminton and weightlifting.

"The most difficult thing in organizing Para Games is our lack of experience as we've never done it before," Dr. Hoang Vinh Giang, General Secretary and Vice President of the Vietnam Olympic Committee, said.

As for the 22nd SEA Games, the opening ceremony will be held at the My Dinh National Stadium.

"Para Games volunteers must care for the athletes more than their SEA Games counterparts," Vu Thanh Mon, a member of the reception committee, told the state-controlled Vietnam News daily.

Vietnam put its national pride on the line with the Southeast Asian Games. Thousands of colored flags and banners have been hung throughout the 11 provinces and cities hosting events. *AFP*

AC Milan reaches quarterfinals

ROME—European champion AC Milan just needed one goal by its striker Filippo Inzaghi to defeat Sampdoria 1-0 Thursday and reach the quarterfinals of the Italian Cup.

The home win at San Siro stadium in a third-round, second-leg match lifted the Milan powerhouse into the next round on a 2-0 aggregate score.

Inzaghi netted the winner in the 13th minute, tapping in a low pass from defender Kakha Kaladze.

In early matches, defending league champion Juventus qualified at the expense of Serie A newcomer Siena, while Udinese advanced on a 4-0 aggregate after a 3-0 home win over Bologna.

At Stadio Delle Alpi, goals by the imaginative Alessandro Del Piero and Argentine-born midfielder Mauro German Camoranesi fired La Juve to a 2-1 victory for a 4-2 aggregate.

Del Piero netted the opening goal in the 45th minute, scoring with a low, precise shot. *AP*

Armstrong not quitting Tour de France yet

ARMSTRONG

WASHINGTON—Five-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong says he'll compete in two more tours before retiring.

Armstrong expects to race in the 2004 and 2005 tours but has not made plans for what to do after he retires.

A win next year would give Armstrong a record sixth straight.

"I know that I'm here today and I'm alive today and I've been blessed to have this life and this sport, and I want to win the 2004 Tour de France," Armstrong said.

Armstrong, a testicular cancer survivor who overcame the disease, spoke Wednesday at the National Press Club to unveil a new drive to increase funding for cancer research. *AP*

Suzuki stays with Seattle Mariners

SEATTLE—Ichiro Suzuki is happy. So are the Seattle Mariners.

Japanese slugger Suzuki avoided salary arbitration by agreeing to a $44 million, four-year contract Thursday, keeping the All-Star right fielder and one-time American League Most Valuable Player at the top of manager Bob Melvin's lineup.

"He clearly was very happy, and he doesn't show emotion much," said Suzuki's agent, Tony Attanasio. "His attitude was one of satisfaction and elation." *AP*

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Editor **Aries Espinosa**

The Big Idea(s) in the newspaper business

PHOTOS BY JUN CAPULONG

THE PHILIPPINE Daily Inquirer, INQ7.net and Inquirer Publications Inc contingent showed the over 3,000 delegates of the local advertising industry's 'mecca' The 18th Philippine Advertising Congress who really was number one in the newspaper business-in print and in the Web. The show of force culminated with the Inquirer contingent hosting the final lunch of the 4-day Congress, and Inquirer president Sandy Prieto-Romualdez revealing the organization's own '8 Big Ideas' in a unique and well-received 'multimedia' speech. Inquirer's resident 'eventologist' Tim Yap and lifestyle columnist Tessa Prieto-Valdes emceed the show, which was highlighted by Fil-Am comedy sensation Rex Navarette's number. Shown above is the team's victory pose after the successful lunch. Earlier, Inquirer senior vice president for sales and marketing Rene R. Reinoso (left) and advertising vice president Pepito R. Olarte were already busy warming the Congress crowd up as they drew winners for the 'early bird' breakfast raffle. The 18th Philippine Advertising Congress was held from Nov. 19 to 22 in Baguio City.

PETPlans Success Business System launched

LORENZO T. Ocampo and Donally Bringas

LORENZO Ocampo, Roselen Ocampo, Donally Bringas

PRESIDENT and CEO Larry Ocampo (2nd from right) raises a toast for the success of the PETPlans Success Business System with FVP Donally Bringas (extreme right) and some PSBS Business partners.

FROM left: Angelito Trinidad, Rafael Ocampo, Donally Bringas, Theodore de Guzman, Estanislao Herbosa

PHOTOS BY JUN CAPULONG

CLUB MANILA EAST VILLA IS NOW OPEN

Christmas opening rates for as low as P850/pax for 4 persons. Includes breakfast and pool entrance. Room is furnished with TV, ref, and microwave. Call 660-2805/01 or 658-2065.

UPMas homecoming

THE UP Medical Alumni Society, organized in 1946 under the leadership of Dr. Juan Salcedo Jr. of Class 1929, will hold its homecoming on Dec. 20 to 21 with UPCM Class '78, the silver jubilarians as main host of the affair. The alumni affair's theme is "A Homecoming for All". The homecoming on Dec. 20 will be held at the UP-PGH complex and UP campus. The homecoming ball on Dec. 21 will be held at the Reception Hall of the PICC, Roxas Boulevard. For more information, call Dr. Pilar Dy or Dr. Nanette Gana at 734-2110 and 521-8248.

Rustans Marketing Corp. Sale at the 5th Angel Sent Bazaar

TO USHER the last minute shoppers this Holiday Season, Rustans Marketing Corp is giving 50-80 percent discount during the 5th Angel Sent Bazaar on Dec. 20 and 21, at the Lower Lobby of Edsa Shangri-La Hotel Mandaluyong. On sale are Citre Shine/Denman, Max Factor, Jack Nicklaus, Maidenform, United Colors of Benetton, Tefal, Rowenta, Spacebag, YSL Menswear, and more. For details contact 8250804 or 8253482.

ProductFILES

Superior writing tool in spirited TV ad

PARKER'S next big thing, the gel pen, has debuted on the small screen, in a commercial that creatively highlights their unique features. It can be seen in two versions, a 30-seconder and a more concise one that only runs for 15 seconds. The TV ad, based on material produced in Australia, makes use of state-of-the-art digital artistry.

In the tradition of advertisements that are visually outstanding, the Parker Gel Pen commercial easily inspires recall with painstaking computer-generated effects, while standing out in a television ad landscape that's already deluged with 3D animation aplenty. Continuing its "Aim High" campaign, the most recognized name in pen craftsmanship unveils its newest groundbreaking product.

Utilizing kinetic imagery, the Parker Gel Pen ad effortlessly brings many noteworthy properties of the products to the fore. The actual pens themselves, like those seen in the commercial, possess the same capacity for great, repetitious motions and laudable writing performances.

Symphonies of the Season at The Podium

NOT TO be missed while shopping or dining out at The Podium is its sparkling and scintillating Christmas decor. A modern yet elegant visual delight, these consist of gold and silver spun trees and innovative Christmas balls in a marvelous play of lights.

Also not to be missed is Symphonies of the Season, a series of joyous musical presentations by some of the country's top choral groups. All performances will be held at The Podium's second floor lounge.

The Manila Philharmonic Orchestra together with the Kundirana will be performing on Dec. 23 at 7 p.m. This all-Filipino orchestra established by Rodel Colmenar will perform Christmas carols as only a live orchestra can.

The Ateneo de Manila Glee Club, meanwhile will Deck the Malls with The Sounds of Christmas on Dec. 20 at 8 p.m. Considered the oldest university chorale in the country, the Ateneo de Manila Glee Club began as a boy's choir in 1921.

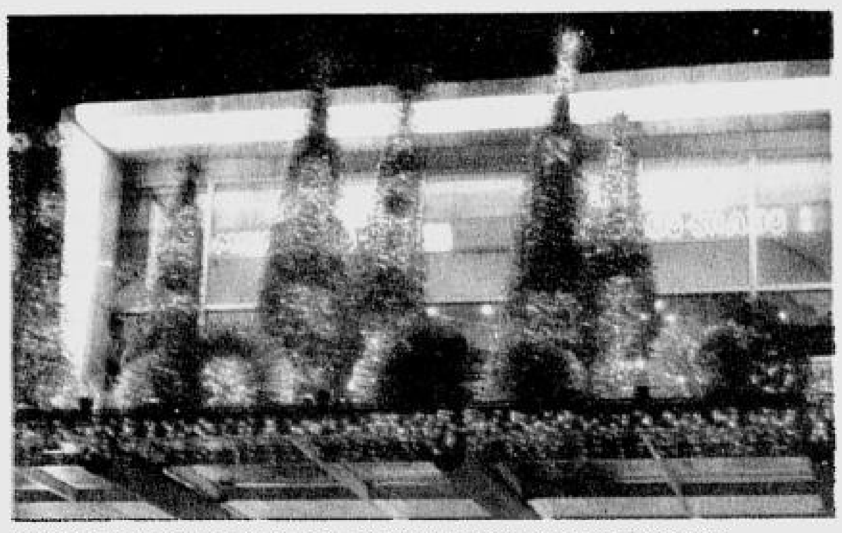
Since then, it has been recognized both in the Philippines and abroad through prestigious awards. Along with its numerous tours of the Philippines, as well as Asia, Guam, Europe and North America, the ADMGC has won top honors and gold medals most recently in Maribor, Slovenia; Riva del Garda, Italy; Ireland; France and Spain (2000).

In this performance, they embark on a new paradigm in choral singing with professor Lourdes Hermo, herself an alumna if the world-renowned Philippine Madrigal Singers. She will be assisted by Raymond Diaz.

More Sounds of Christmas: the Bagong Himig Alumni Choir will perform on Dec. 22 at 8 p.m. Originally composed of sixteen students of the Philippine College of Commerce (now PUP) led by Rafael Amaranto in 1969, the group has for the past thirty years won numerous choral singing festivals, participated in various rock concerts, and shows, and involved itself in theatrical productions like the Rock-zarzuela and Kamandag.

Capping the season's symphonies is Let Your Praises Be Heard by Bukas Palad on Dec. 27 at 7 p.m. For the past 17 years, the Ateneo based Bukas Palad has been on the forefront of creating and propagating original Filipino Inspirational music. Their songs like Hindi Kita Malilimutan, Tanging Yaman, and Sa Yo Lang have taken root in the Filipino heart. Under the Jesuit Music Ministry of the Ateneo De Manila University, the group has recorded ten albums since 1986, and has performed in over 100 solo concerts in the Philippines and the United States.

Enjoy the Symphonies of the Season at The Podium in ADB Avenue in Ortigas Center.


GOLD Christmas trees light up The Podium's canopy for a grand entrance.

MITSUBISHI APPOINTS BBDO GUERRERO ORTEGA FOR SALES DRIVE

BBDO Guerrero Ortega has been appointed by Mitsubishi Motors Philippines to handle all its creative and media business. The Mitsubishi win covers all advertised creative and media business of the company's automotive roster which includes the total line-up of SUVs, Pick-ups, Vans, AUVs, passenger cars, parts, service and dealer support. In photo are (from left): Mark Peckson (account executive), Luigi Ignacio (account director), Susan Dimacali (president and CEO), David Guerrero (chair and executive creative director), Melchor Dizon (senior vice president), Arlan Reyes (supervisor, brand advertising), Froilan Dytianquin (senior marketing services manager)

FREEMASONS CONDUCT MEDICAL MISSION

Labong Lodge #59, of Masonic District #3, and Camanava Traveller's Inc, conducted a medical mission to the community of Catmon, Malabon, in cooperation with the Manila Chinatown Charity Foundation and the Missionaries of the Poor. Approximately 1,120 patients were served during the said mission. Shown in photo are the Freemasons during the medical mission.

BPI among 'best in governance'

THE BANK of the Philippines Islands (BPI) has made it to the list of Asian companies adjudged best in corporate governance. It shares the honor with Globe Telecom and Ayala Land, its fellow member-companies under Ayala Group.

BPI is the only bank included in the list of the best in the Philippines. The five corporations and their respective rankings are Globe Telecom, first; SM Prime, 2nd; Ayala Land and BPI, 3rd; and PLDT, 5th.

The Asset, a financial magazine based in Hong Kong, determined the ranking of the companies after a survey of global institutional investors doing business in China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines.

Survey targets were the top 100 institutional investors, with a total of $200 billion invested in Asian equities. These behemoths accounted for 90 percent of equity assets held by institutional investors.

A total of 27 investitutional investors with $2 billion assets under management participated in this year's survey. It was the greatest response ever, according to the publication's research team.

The survey targets were asked to nominate the best six companies in terms of good corporate governance. It is their response that formed the basis of the ranking.

According to The asset, investors are interested in how the corporation relates to shareholders; transparency, regularity, and depth of financial reporting; business strategy and competitive positioning; growth prospects and dividend policy.

ZEST-O JUICE INVADES THE LRT

Zest-O Juice, the leading juice drink in the country, makes it fun and more colorful for the LRT commuters. The LRT coach is now designed with Zest-O's 'What's Ur Flavor?' sticker which is truly a feast to everyone's eyes. It showcases the brand's widest variant range that definitely suits each Pinoy's taste.

BAHAGHARI GIVES DONATION

Bahaghari Productions, organizer of the country's top male pageant Maharlikang Pilipino donated its proceeds to Associacion de Damas Filipinas' Settlement House, a shelter for orphans. Taken during the turn-over, Photo shows (From left): executive chair Dr. Nonie Azarcon, Settlement House president Elenita Nolasco and executive producer Greg Mil Palacio.

VISA
VISA Electron
All it
YOU'RE IN GOOD HANDS WITH METROBANK

METROBANK AND VISA OFFER VISA/PLUS ATM SERVICE

Metrobank, the country's largest bank, and Visa International jointly announced that local currency cash dispensing service is now available through the Visa/Plus network at the bank's over 600 automated teller machines, called Metrobank ET nationwide. Plus is Visa's global mark for ATMs. Cardholders can use their Visa (including Visa Electron) or Plus-branded ATM card issued by their financial institution for cash withdrawals in local currency anytime, seven days-a-week. In photo are (from left): Anton Romulo, country manager, Visa International; June Seah, senior manager for Southeast Asia, Visa International; Angelito Villanueva, senior executive vice president, MetroBank and Reynante Banico, vice president for e-Banking Metrobank.

EO-EXECUTIVE OPTICAL BAGS AWARD

EO-Executive Optical, a leader in the Philippine optical industry, has recently been given the 'Outstanding Optical Shop' award by the Family Consumers Choice for 2003. EO-Executive Optical services is accessible through 30 branches nationwide. Receiving the award is Arleen Marie Lindo (third from left), EO's senior marketing manager.

TEAM TEACHING: STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO RE TURED

DIWA GOES TO GENERAL SANTOS AND ZAMBOANGA FOR SEMINAR

More than 300 school teachers and administrators participated at Diwa Learning Systems Inc Teachers Educators Forum (DTEF) at General Santos City last Nov. 14 and 15. Held separately at Notre Dame of Marbel University (NDMU) and Notre Dame of Dadiangas College (NDDC), the seminar focused on the various strategies and methodologies of 'Team Teaching as a Strategic Response to Restructures Basic Education Curriculum (RBEC). The seminars proved to be a success with the teachers learning in depth practical and doable classroom activities that may be applied in their class. A seminar was likewise held at St. Columban College Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur last Nov. 21 to 22, where more than 50 teachers were given an understanding and appreciation on 'The Teaching of Methodologies and the Integration of Values in the English Classroom.

RAMOS' 45TH 'SAPPHIRE' WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Former Board of Accountancy chair, Jose 'Toti' Ramos and Dra. Nimfa Juarez Ramos recently celebrated their 45th 'Sapphire' wedding anniversary at the Grand Ballroom of the Bacolod Convention Plaza Hotel. Shown in photo with them are their children together with their spouses and grandchildren.

Bits & Clips

Mr. Suave night at Bigger Bang Las Piñas

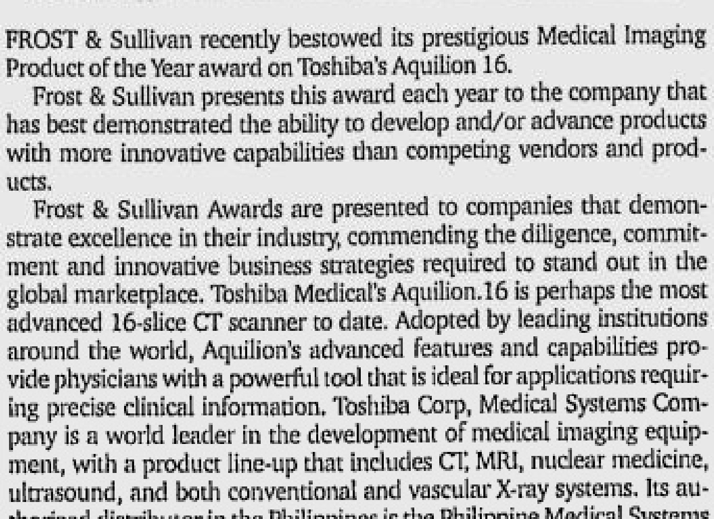
Parokya ni Edgar, the genius behind the monster hit Mr. Suave, is set to perform the song and their other hits in a live performance at Bigger Bang sa Las Piñas on Dec. 21, at 6 p.m. Other big-ticket acts and name bands will also perform live. Get to watch the show and join in the most fun carnival and bazaar in the whole metropolis this Christmas season for a bargain price admission fee of P100 per person and, for an additional P100, one can avail of the ride-all-you can package special for that night only. The 8-hectare Bigger Bang sa Las Piñas is located along the Alabang-Zapote Road corner Daanghari. It offers more than 30 rides and attractions. The Carnival also includes dozens of bazaar and tiangge stalls to satisfy one's Christmas shopping needs.

UPMG to meet

FOR THE first time in history, the United Print Media Group will hold a 2-day seminar-workshop on Dec. 20 to 21 at the Manila Hotel for UPMG member publications: Abante, Business World, Cook Magazine, Flavors, Freeman, Journal, Kabayan, Liwayway Magazine, Malaya, Manila Standard, Manila Bulletin, Metro Magazine, MOD Magazine, Mr. & Ms., Panay News, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippine Star, Pilipino Star Ngayon, QT Magazine, Today, Vanity Magazine, Woman Home Companion, Woman Today. The event features information packed workshops led by a team of practitioners and industry experts. The meeting aims to strengthen and support the print industry in the local scenario. Latest trends is printing technology will be tackled on day 1 while marketing of print ad space will be tackled on Day 2. Partly funded by the Philippine Advertising Board, the Educational Development Seminar is free for UPMG members.

ProductFILES

Imaging product of the year



FROST & Sullivan recently bestowed its prestigious Medical Imaging Product of the Year award on Toshiba's Aquilion 16.

Frost & Sullivan presents this award each year to the company that has best demonstrated the ability to develop and/or advance products with more innovative capabilities than competing vendors and products.

Frost & Sullivan Awards are presented to companies that demonstrate excellence in their industry, commending the diligence, commitment and innovative business strategies required to stand out in the global marketplace. Toshiba Medical's Aquilion.16 is perhaps the most advanced 16-slice CT scanner to date. Adopted by leading institutions around the world, Aquilion's advanced features and capabilities provide physicians with a powerful tool that is ideal for applications requiring precise clinical information. Toshiba Corp, Medical Systems Company is a world leader in the development of medical imaging equipment, with a product line-up that includes CT, MRI, nuclear medicine, ultrasound, and both conventional and vascular X-ray systems. Its authorized distributor in the Philippines is the Philippine Medical Systems Inc at the 4th floor of Vernida I Condominium, 120 Amorsolo Street, Makati City. Call 892-4944 to 47 for more details.

All the Newest Phones free from Globe this Christmas

WANT to know the best present you can give your friends, loved ones or even yourself this Christmas season? Why, it's the gift of connectivity from Globe, of course.

From Nov. 21 to Dec. 31, Globe is offering the best deals on the newest handsets this side of Santa's workshop. Imagine the faces of your family and friends when instead of the usual Christmas present, you hand them a beautifully wrapped package with either a Samsung C100, Bird S288, Sony Ericsson Z600, Sony Ericsson P900, Nokia 3100, Nokia 1100, Panasonic G50, Nokia 6220, Treo 600 or Nokia 6600 inside. All these new handsets come for free with any G-Plan. To add even more glee to your Christmas gift, each handset comes with a free G-plan Opti-SIM, the world's most powerful SIM card.

Globe's latest Christmas offering has something for everybody. If you're planning to give a cellphone to somebody who's just beginning to discover the joys of mobile living, make that person extremely happy by giving him either a Nokia 1100, or a Bird S288. These mobile units are all equipped with the standard cellphone features such as text messaging and voice calls, as well as special add-ons that are particular to each phone.

Capture your G-moments this Christmas when you get these MMS-enabled phones for you and your loved ones: the triband Nokia 3100 introduces them to the exciting world of MMS which lets owners send and receive colored photos of G-moments, as well as download colored wallpapers and hot polytones from the myGlobe WAP site, which can be easily accessed by simply pressing the myGlobe hotkey on the phone. Get this phone for free by availing of the G-Talk Plan 1200.

Mad about polyphonic ringtones? Choose from either the Panasonic G50 or the Samsung C100. With its colored LCD screen and triband capabilities, the Panasonic G50 is one hot deal that is really hard to beat. Get it for free at G-Talk Plus P1, 800 monthly. The Samsung C100 is a cool GPRS-enabled cellphone; which has a vibrant 65,000-color screen. Get it for free at G-Mix Plan 800.

Friends who receive a Nokia 6220 will certainly light up brighter than a Christmas tree. The Edge-capable Nokia 6220 has a built-in camera and video recording function, ideal for taking snapshots and video vignettes of your G-moments during this holiday season and all year through. Powered by Edge technology, this phone gives you faster and richer Internet connectivity. Get the Nokia 6220 for free with G-Max Plan 3500.

The Sony Ericsson Z600 is an ideal gift for fashionistas who want cellphones that are as stylish and trendy as they are. With its flip top design, built-in camera, 65K color and changeable cover, this phone is a sure head-turner. Get it for free on G-Match Plan 2500.

The Nokia 6600 is an ideal gift for cellphone enthusiasts who are photography buffs as well. With its built in camera with zoom, expect to have hours of endless creative fun with this phone, free on G-Max Plan 3500.

Globe's glittery offering of top-of-the-line phones Sony Ericsson P900 and Treo 600, which come free on Platinum Plan at P5000 monthly, will really make bonafide cellphone connoisseurs feel like they are really on top of the world.

Get any of Globe's newest merry handsets during the specified promo period at any Globe Business Centers or Hub in Metro Manila and get a special treat from Urban Spa as well. By getting any of these hot Holiday handsets from G-Plans, you get a gift voucher which entitles you to discounts on selected Urban Spa services such as Express Massage, Aroma Therapy Massage, Facial Massage, Body Scrub and Executive Bliss. Another gift from Globe to relax you after a tiring day of Christmas shopping.

Get on Globe with these delightful deals this Christmas season, and find out why there are more people on G-Plans than any other mobile service.

MAKE Christmas time a truly joyful season of connectivity with this exciting collection of the newest handsets available for free on Globe's G-Plans.

IRANIAN AMBASSADOR VISITS THE INQUIRER

Visiting the Philippine Daily Inquirer recently are Iranian ambassador Jalal Kalantari and Reza Pirpiran Najafabadi. Welcoming them are Inquirer publisher Isagani Yambot, president Sandy Romualdez and corporate relations manager Celine Madamba.

INTELLIGENT STORAGE FOR THE FINANCE SECTOR

Abbe Technology Solutions Inc and technology partner's Asian Business Solutions Inc (Absi) and EMC, recently held an executive forum for the finance industry. The event highlighted the significance of data and information across the industry and how organizations should effectively manage these critical assets. Also featured was the world's first Content Addressed Storage (CAS) technology of EMC. Abbe is a premier information and storage management solution provider and a Value Added Systems Integrator of EMC Corp providing world-class products and professional services in the market. Absi markets and supports the FileNet Family of Products which provides electronic document management, document-imaging, Cold (computer output to laser disk), and workflow solutions. Photo shows (from left): Michael Ledesma, president Abbe; Danny Papadatos, director channels development - Filenet; Guan Tan, sales director - Filenet; Ng Cheng Tek, program manager - EMC; Carol Magsino, board member - PRMA; Menchie Aragon, president - Absi; Joshua Gohoc, business unit head EDMS - Absi; Teddy Sumulong, country channels manager - EMC.

Protect your home and furniture from wood eating pests

A MAN'S home is his castle and the pride of his family. It is a treasured investment - the result of years of hard work, attention to detail and meticulous planning. However, this beautiful and expensive home can come crashing down any minute now because of neglect.

Without knowing it, your home could be a haven of insects silently destroying its very foundations. These wood pests could eat up your home and life's savings in a matter of months, inflicting huge and costly damages to your antique furniture, wooden panels, doors, cabinets, tables, and other wood products. In the absence and scarcity of good quality wood nowadays, there's no telling what will be left after the damage is done - if your home is still standing. Are you prepared for this problem?

Fortunately, there's a better and faster way of stopping wood pests and preserving the beauty of wooden furniture and other wood products for years. Introducing Cislin 2.5 EC 100 milliliter (ml) - the new and affordable way to protect wood from Bayer Environmental Science.

Cislin 2.5 EC contains deltamethrin - the most powerful pyrethroid-based insecticide in the market today that effectively controls all wood pests. Simply dilute Cislin 2.5 EC in water, light oil, kerosene, paint or varnish. Spray or brush it on the wood product to be treated and your troubles are over.

Cislin 2.5 EC can be used on lumber for building materials and furniture making or on processed wood products like furniture, cabinets and doors. Its active ingredient provides long lasting protection and stops all major insect species that destroy wood like powder-post beetles (bukbok), dry-wood termites (unos) and woodworms.

There's no end to what you can do with Cislin 2.5 EC. Use it on sawn timber, rattan furniture, particleboards, plywood, pallets and other indigenous materials and your wood is protected for years.

The best part is that Cislin 2.5 EC is odorless and non-straining and has a high safety profile. With the new affordable 100 ml packaging of Cislin 2.5 EC, furniture makers and homeowners have a more practical solution to long-lasting wood protection. For more information, call Bayer Environmental Science (tel. Nos. 450-3632 and 450-3759).

ProductFILES

More movie magic? Make way for MyAyala's M-Pass card

FOR the coming Christmas season, give movie buffs the ultimate stocking stuffer with the first-of-its-kind Multi-Pass card.

Each bragging rights to be among the first to watch - and ever-so conveniently at that - to enjoy forthcoming big movies as the much-awaited final offering of The Lord of the Rings' trilogy, The Return of the King, premiering in December, and next year's must-sees Spider Man 2 and Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, to name a few.

Aptly dubbed as "your fast lane to the movies," MyAyala.com, Inc's Multi-Pass or M-Pass, is the first-of-its-kind prepaid system that allows moviegoers to purchase and reserve their theater seats online. Definitely, your fast lane to the movies.

No need to go through the hassle of queuing at the theater counters next time you want to watch that much awaited big Hollywood movie. Log on to MyAyala's Sureseats.com website, subscribe if you're not a member yet, view the screening schedules, take your pick of the sked, and seat placement even number of seats you like. You can pay for your tickets online using the M-Pass prepaid cards purchased at Greenbelt 3 cinemas. The prepaid cards can be loaded from P200 to as much as P2,000 and are valid up to three months from date of purchase.

Next, simply show up a few minutes before the screening time - absolutely no need to drop by Greenbelt 3 cinemas' movie counters - and pass your card over the bar code scanner at the M-Pass station by the theater entrance. Powered by Cisco's first-rate wireless technology, the data on your M-Pass card guarantees 24-hour accuracy and reliability.

Currently, only Greenbelt 3 Cinemas patrons can enjoy the benefits of the M-Pass cards. Plans are already underway, however, to launch the system at the Alabang Town Center and at the Ayala Center in Cebu early next year.

Rev up the magic to your movie watching experience, check out Sureseats.com for subscription or for more details.

Bits & Clips

CA'S 'BREAKFAST TO CHARITY' PROGRAM

If a one-week diet means losing five pounds, a one-week company breakfast 'diet' for Computer Associates Int'l Inc (CA) means helping 589 Elsie Gaches wards. Recently, the eBusiness software maker donated a cheque to the Elsie Gaches Village, which the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne immediately used for the purchase of medicines good for two weeks. The week before the donation came, the village had no medicines. The Sisters of Charity have been rendering volunteer work at Elsie Gaches for the last 10 years. The charity serves as a haven for abandoned mentally ill children and adults, most of them also suffering from autism, cerebral palsy, hydrocephalus, visual and hearing defects. The charity was founded in 1964 by a philanthropic couple - Samuel and Elsie Gaches. Photo shows CA Philippines country manager Ley Salcedo helping the wards of Camia Pavilion with their dinner, which the firm also provided when the company officials visited the community.

INT'L LAW FIRM HEAD IN RP

Christine Lagarde, chair of the Global Executive Committee of the prestigious international law firm Baker & McKenzie, is greeted upon her arrival at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport by fellow lawyers Romeo Salonga and Chris Lim, senior partners of the Quisumbing Torres law office. Lagarde is in the country for the 40th anniversary celebration of the Quisumbing Torres law office, which is affiliated with Baker & McKenzie and considered as one of the best law firms in the Philippines.

IJAZZ CONCERT AT THE SHANG

John Lesaca (shown above) showed another dimension when he not only played the usual violin but also sung Beatles songs and deftly fingered the electric kudyapi last Nov. 22 during the first of iJazz concerts at the Shangri-La Plaza Mall. Presented by Shangri-La Plaza, Citizen Watches, No Curfew in cooperation with Rose Bowl Premium Canned Seafood, and in partnership with Tokyo Tokyo, Novellino Italian Wines, Figaro Coffee Company, The Daily Tribune, 105.1 Crossover, Joey @92.3, NU 107, Infocamp and Trackstudios.

Chemworld seminars

LEARN how to make colognes and body spray, plus discover the art and science of aromatherapy through hands-on workshop/seminars by Chemworld Fragrance Institute, a division of Chemworld Marketing Corp. For Perfume-Making, schedules for the first quarter of 2004 are as follows: (Saturdays, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.) - Jan. 24 and 31, Feb. 7 and 21, and March 6 and 20; (Tuesdays, from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.) - Jan. 13 and 27, Feb. 10 and 24 and March 9 and 23. The Aromatherapy Seminars are slated on the following dates: (Saturdays, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.) - Feb. 28 and March 27; (Tuesdays, from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.) - Jan. 20, Feb. 17 and March 16. The workshop/seminars will be held at the Training Room of the Chemworld/Godiva office, 5th Floor Oppen Building, 349 Sen. Gil Puyat Avenue, Makati City. For more details and inquiries about discounts for groups of three or more, contact Catherine Alfalfara at 890-9844 to 47 local 14/38, 0917-8736547, 0917-8736548 or 0916-6902280.

Celebrity Toy Museum

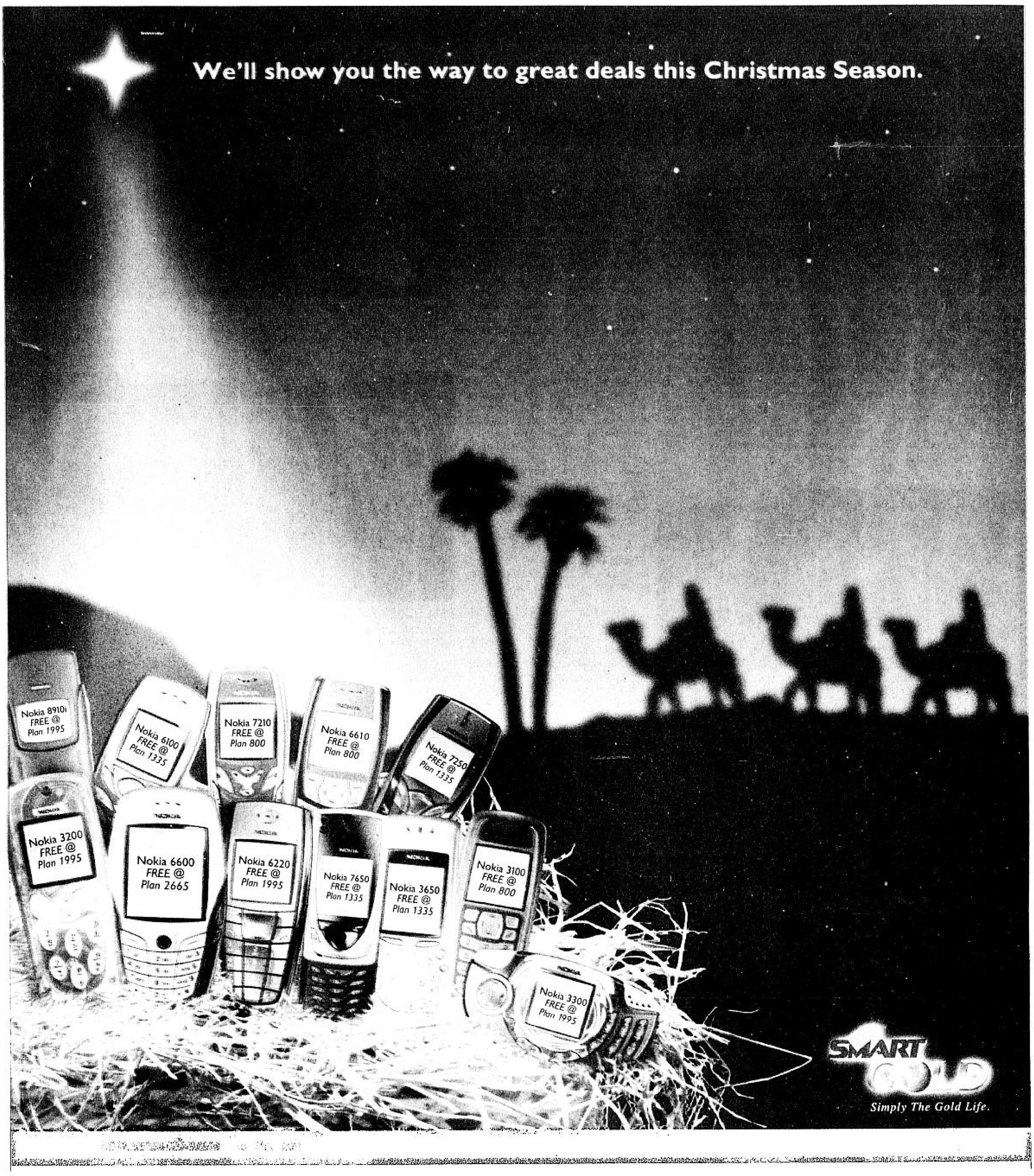
YES, Virginia, they play with toys too. Celebrities do have toys like you and me. And they are lending them for the fans to see at the Celebrity Toy Museum at The Great Christmas Toy Show, to be held at Megatrade Hall 2 SM Megamall on December 17 to 21, 2003. The Show is to be staged back to back with The Wonderful Christmas Gift and Food Show. Showbiz stars who will be showcasing their toys at the one-of-a-kind Toy Musuem are Rica Peralejo, Bernard Palanca, Dingdong Dantes, Ogie Alcasid, Michael V., Nikki Valdez, Zoren Legaspi, and Paula Peralejo among others. There are also kiddie parlor games, clown acts, and a wonderful Christmas Raffle for lucky shoppers where fantastic prizes including a free trip to Hong Kong are up for grabs. For inquiries or booth reservations, please call the Neotrade Christmas Hotline at 812-9099 or 812-3973.

District convention of Jehova's Witnesses

One of the 65 District Convention of Jehova's Witnesses in 52 cities in the Philippines is to be held in Barangay San Francisco, Victoria, Laguna from Dec. 19, 20, and 21. Expected delegates of over 4000 will be coming from Cavite and Metro Manila. The main highlight of the event will be a Public Disclosure on Dec. 21, 2003, at 1:40 p.m. It is entitled "Who Are Giving God Glory Today?" which will be delivered by Denton Hopkinson, of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, Philippine branch.

Candle Design finalists

The Department of Trade and Industry, Product Development and Design Center of the Philippines, is facilitating the 2003 Candle Design Awards slated on Dec. 20, during the 5th Angel Sent Bazaar at the Edsa Shangri-La Hotel Lower Lobby, Mandaluyong City. This year's finalists underwent an orientation meeting to further enhance their knowledge on the above categories and participants came from all over the country. For details about contact 8250804 or 8253482.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Nokia 3200 FREE @ Plan 1995
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Nokia 6220 FREE @ Plan 1995
Nokia 7650 FREE @ Plan 1335
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Nokia 3100 FREE @ Plan 800
Nokia 3300 FREE @ Plan 1995
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______ City ______ ZIP code ______

Home Contact No.: ______ Date of Birth: ___/___/___ (Month Day Year) Age: ______

Mother's Maiden Name: ______

Name of Spouse: ______

Spouse's Business Address: ______

Contact No. of Spouse: ______

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

Office/Company Name: ______

Position In Company: ______

Office/Company Address: ______ No. ______ Street ______ Barangay ______

______ City ______ ZIP code ______ Office/Company Tel. No.: ______

I affirm that the given information is true and correct and hereby authorize SMART Communications, Inc. to verify such information from whatever sources it may consider appropriate. I understand that I may be requested to submit additional requirements to facilitate the processing of this application. I also authorize SMART Communications, Inc. to charge the advanced Monthly Service Fee to my credit card.

Accomplish this form and fax it to (02) 511-2213 up to 2214 for Metro Manila; (032) 232-3014 for Metro Cebu; (082) 224-5782 for Metro Davao together with a photocopy of your credit card showing both sides and a copy of your valid ID with photo and signature. Areas covered in Metro Cebu Cebu City, Talisay City, Lapu-Lapu City, and Mandaue City. In Metro Davao Tibungco to Toril.

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Type: ☐ Gold ☐ Silver Card Issuer Bank: ______

Card No. ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Expiry Date ☐☐ ☐☐ (Month Year) Last 3 digits at the back of the credit card ☐☐☐

Credit Card Billing Address: ☐ Home ☐ Office
☐ Others ______

☐ I would like to avail of a Nokia ______ under ☐ Plan 800 ☐ Plan 1335 and will enroll my account under the Auto Debit Agreement (ADA) and have my monthly bills charged to my credit card.

☐ I would like to avail of a Nokia ______ under ☐ Plan 1995 ☐ Plan 2665

Deliver my phone for FREE to: ☐ Home Address ☐ Office Address

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Requirements*:

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- To switch to Plan 800, bring recent 2 months' paid non-SMART billing statements with a minimum of P1,250 per month. If bill is less than P1,250 per month, subscriber must submit proof of income of P20,000 per month.
  To switch to Plan 1335, bring recent 2 months' paid non-SMART billing statements with a minimum of P1,800 per month. If bill is less than P1,800 per month, subscriber must submit proof of income of P23,000 per month.
  To switch to Plan 1995 and get a Nokia 3300, 6220, or 3200, bring recent 2 months' paid non-SMART billing statements with a minimum of P1,800 per month. If bill is less than P1,800 per month, subscriber must submit proof of income of P23,000 per month.
  To switch to Plan 1995 and get a Nokia 8910i, bring recent 2 months' paid non-SMART billing statements with a minimum of P2,450 per month. If bill is less than P2,450 per month, subscriber must submit proof of income of P28,000 per month
  To switch to Plan 2665, bring recent 2 months' paid non-SMART billing statements with a minimum of P2,450 per month. If bill is less than P2,450 per month, subscriber must submit proof of income of P28,000 per month.
- Switchers and new subscribers (non-switchers) must submit a fully accomplished Service Application Form (SAF), valid I.D., proof of billing address, and financial documents or any locally-issued credit card** with the latest paid bill.
- New subscribers (non-switchers) availing of free handsets under Plan 800 or Plan 1335 must pay the advanced Monthly Service Fee (MSF) via credit card and enroll their account under the Auto Debit Agreement (ADA) to have their monthly bill charged to their enrolled credit card.
- Approval of all applications is subject to SMART credit and financial requirements.

*All plans are covered by a 24-month contract period. Pre-termination charges apply. **Credit card transactions are subject to bank approval

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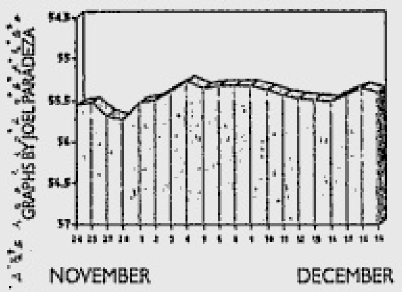
LOW SULFUR

Survey: RP consumers becoming pessimistic

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES

PESO-DOLLAR RATE



P 55.40= $1
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 19, 2003

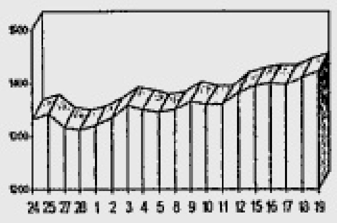
Y 107.62 = $1
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 19, 2003

GOLD: $408.10-408.60
per ounce Hong Kong, Dec. 19, 2003

STOCK MARKET

Telecom stocks lift market

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

STOCKS advanced yesterday, sending the main index to a six-week closing high, led by telecoms stocks, but turnover fell ahead of the long Christmas holidays, traders said.

The country's top two telecom firms, Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) and Globe Telecom, led the gainers, with expectations high that both firms would post strong profits in the fourth quarter and next year, fueled by booming sales of mobile phones.

The Philippine stock index climbed 11.47 points or 0.81 percent to end at 1,422.24 points, its highest since Nov. 6. The market has gained 39.65 percent so far this year.

"It's window dressing, it's usual at this time of the year," said Joey Roxas, president of Eagle Equities.

"But there are few participants now so it's easy to move the market up or down." Turnover narrowed to P439.28 million from P627.36 million on Thursday. Gainers were in a two-to-one majority.

Roxas said the main index's upward momentum may spill over to next week before the market pauses for a long Christmas holiday starting Dec. 24. The market will open again on Dec. 29.

Players are targeting the index's year-high of 1,435 points in the near term.

After the market closed, the government announced the economy probably grew 4.2 percent this year due to strong agricultural output. However, the forecast expansion was lower than last year's 4.4 percent.

Gross domestic product may have grown 3.8 to 4 percent in the year to the fourth quarter, Economic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri said.

PLDT gained P20 or 2.2 percent at P930 and Globe Telecom added P25 or 3.03 percent to P850. The two stocks combined accounted for close to 40 percent of total turnover.

Eagle Equities' Roxas said mobile phone firms were likely to increase their margins in coming months.

Reuters

By Doris C. Dumlao

FILIPINO consumers are among the most pessimistic in the Asian region, with only a third expecting improvement in the domestic economy over the next 12 months, according to the latest online survey by global research firm ACNielsen.

In a press briefing yesterday, AC Nielsen managing director for Southeast Asia Bienvenido Niles Jr. said that based on a survey conducted in October this year, consumer confidence was returning to the region, but at a much lower degree in the Philippines.

Niles said there was a correlation between the deteriorating confidence level and the depreciation in the peso-dollar exchange rate. The higher the depreciation, the less optimistic Filipinos become.

Asked about other possible reasons, Niles said: "People seem to think that our GDP (gross domestic product) is not growing as much as they wanted. Also, some of the things that happened—like the Oakwood mutiny, the attempt to impeach Supreme Court Justice (Hilario Davide Jr.) and the Naia hostage-taking—might have affected sentiment."

The political uncertainties in the run-up to the May elections were likewise affecting consumer confidence, he said.

The AC Nielsen survey, which was conducted in 12 countries across the Asia-Pacific region, covered 609 respondents in the Philippines, 80 percent of which were in the upper or ABC income groups.

The major concerns of Filipino consumers, the survey indicated, were job security (32 percent) and the economy (31 percent), while less respondents worried about health (16 percent), crime (8 percent), terrorism (7 percent) and war (one percent).

Only 33 percent of the Filipino respondents said they believed the economy would improve over the next 12 months, dropping from the 38 percent level during the previous survey in May.

Niles noted that this was among the lowest in the region. In Indonesia, for instance, 89 percent said they expected an improvement in the economy while the levels were likewise high in Thailand (84 percent), Malaysia (76 percent); Singapore (69 percent); and, Hong Kong (67 percent). All these countries showed more optimistic results compared to the previous survey in May.

Joining the Philippines among the least optimistic countries were Korea and Japan which posted an equal rate of 31 percent.

The same survey also showed that only 13 percent of Filipino respondents believed that the economy had improved over the last six months, likewise among the lowest rate in the region. Only 3 percent gave a similar reply in Korea and 15 percent in Japan.

Over the period covered, Philippine GDP grew by 3.2 percent while the peso depreciated by almost 3.2 percent.

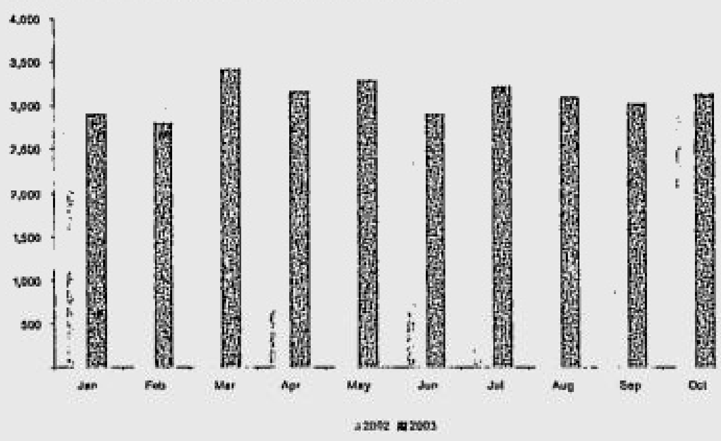
Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia—which posted higher GDP growth rates of 5.7 percent, 5.8 percent and 4.4 percent, respectively, and whose currencies stood firmer—saw a much higher confidence level. In Indonesia, 85 percent felt improvement in the economy while the rates in Thailand and Malaysia stood at 82 percent and 59 percent.

Despite the gloomy outlook, however, Niles said Filipino consumers continued to spend albeit at a lower scale compared to the regional average.

SURVEY/B3

Imports reverse decline, jumped 7% in October

TOTAL IMPORTS
January to October 2002 and 2003, in million US $



THE COUNTRY's import bill rose by 7 percent in October from a year ago, reversing the 4.5-percent contraction in September, as manufacturers beefed up inventories to take advantage of stronger demand during the Christmas season.

The National Statistics Office yesterday reported that the merchandise imports hit $6.38 billion in October, fueled by higher payments for capital goods like telecommunication equipment and electrical machinery as well as raw materials and intermediate goods like electronics.

"After two months of negative growth, an indicator of increasing demand due to the holiday season can be seen in the 7-percent increase of October merchandise imports," ATR-Kim Eng Securities economist Luz Lorenzo said.

There was an 8.9-percent growth in payments for electronic products to $1.5 billion from a year ago, accounting for 47.4 percent of the total bill.

This fueled a 7-percent growth in payments for raw materials and intermediate goods, which accounted for 39.4 percent of the bill.

Importation of capital goods likewise climbed by 18.2 percent from a year ago, accounting for $1.32 billion or 41.8 percent of total imports.

On the other hand, expenditures for mineral fuels, lubricants and related materials fell by 9.2 percent to $251.44 million from $276.91 million during the same period last year.

Purchases of consumer goods valued at $218.93 million also slowed down by 19.8 percent from October 2002, while special transactions climbed by 2.2 percent to $120.14 million.

"In the remaining months of the year we expect imports of consumer goods to pick up as well to fill holiday demand," Lorenzo said.

The country's top sources of merchandise were still Japan and the United States with a share of 21.8 percent and 18.2 percent.

Doris C. Dumlao

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Fees lift

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Banal III

JUST a few days ago, authorities raided an office. No, it did not have anything to do with somebody's nude frontal photos downstairs. The raid took place in Germany.

Still, the raid got this cute administration of Gloriaetta somewhat excited, but not in the carnal sense. It's just that the office belonged to the German firm Fraport.

That is the same company which sued the Philippine government before the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes, or the ICSID.

Unless you were busy getting a facelift, you know that the government cancelled the contract of Piatco to turn the Naia Terminal 3 into a milking cow.

***

NOW Fraport was the main financial backer of Piatco. And so Fraport is asking for, er, "compensation" from our government.

The claim amounts to a bargain of only $450 million, which Fraport claimed it spent on the Naia 3 project. Honest.

But in a recent article in the US business newspaper Wall Street Journal, a certain Georg Wengert, a shareholder of Fraport, asked an interesting question.

Only $280 million went to Takenaka, the Japanese contractor for the Naia 3. And so Wengert asked: "Where did the rest go?" Don't look at me, sir!

***

CLEARLY, nobody else can answer such a fiery question except the guys from both Fraport and Piatco.

That explains the raid on the office of Fraport's former finance officer Johannes Endler, which showed that the German government was helping us.

The raid was even led by Wolfgang Schaupensteiner, Germany's well-known corruption fighter. Obviously, they are after some trail of bribery done by Fraport.

The German authorities confiscated a lot of disks, hard drives and documents. Nobody expects the material to yield photos of local starlets, frontal or otherwise.

***

FOR instance, a German brokering firm, MM Warburg, noted that Fraport posted in its books some 200 million Euros in consultancy fees.

MM Warburg also used an interesting word to describe the fees. It called them "nebulous." It seems Fraport had this habit of giving fees to "unspecified parties."

The Hong Kong-based business magazine Far Eastern Economic Review even lifted from that MM Warburg report on Fraport's nebulous fees.

And here is the best part. MM Warburg believes that the discovery of those "fees" can hurt Fraport in its suits against the Philippine government. Muwahaha!

***

IF you remember, one "consultant" of Piatco made a big splash in the Senate hearings on the Naia 3 project, going by the name of Alfonso Liongson. Alfonso who?

It turned out that nobody knew who he was. But still Mr. Nobody got, er, "consultancy fees" from Piatco of $200,000 a month, plus huge bonuses.

Mr. Nobody's job was to facilitate changes in Piatco's original contract with the government, such as the infamous so-called Third Supplement.

The DOTC, which was then under Pantaleon Alvarez, okayed it in record time of one day, which was the day after Mr. Nobody became a Piatco "consultant."

***

FOR the hard day's work, Liongson received $200,000 from Piatco, which we know now was actually Fraport's money.

DOTC's Wilfredo Trinidad signed the changes in the contract, together with - who else—the one and only MIAA general manager Edgardo Manda.

But Liongson encountered delays in the "consultancy" work to change the operator of Naia 3 to PAGS Terminal, owned jointly by Piatco's Cheng family and Fraport.

The DOTC approval of that particular change in the contract took an eternity by Liongson's standard, which was all of 11 days.

Thus, for the effort, Piatco gave Liongson, or whoever he was fronting for, only $600,000 of Fraport's money.

***

BUT that is not all. Quick, think of the biggest retail business at any airport! It's the duty free shop, right, and so Piatco, ahh, "consulted" Liongson on it again.

Mr. Nobody, or whoever was hiding behind him, was supposed to get a lease agreement from Duty Free Philippines for a minimal fee of only $200,000.

He did, sometime in the middle of 2002, with the lease agreement signed by Duty Free Philippines chair Michael Kho.

But Piatco did not pay for "consultancy," just using Fraport's money. Even before Fraport came into the picture, Piatco was already busy giving consultancy fees.

***

RECORDED on Piatco's books, for instance, were monthly fees to a company related to the Cheng family, the one called PAGS.

Piatco paid PAGS for design and construction planning. Look at that—design and construction planning!

PAGS did not have anything to do with design and construction planning, for heaven's sakes, because PAGS was an airport ground handling company.

Maybe that's why Piatco got a good deal from PAGS—a monthly fee of only P115,333—getting all that experience in ground-handling for designing and construction planning, at that!

***

NOW, despite all those "consultancy fees" perpetuated by Piatco, our own authorities could not bring themselves to do a full audit of Piatco.

The German authorities, in effect, already forced Fraport to open its books, thanks to the raid on the office of its finance guy.

We do not hear from our own DOJ and DFA, which should perhaps waste no time contacting the German authorities about those seized "goods" from Fraport.

You know, in the spirit of the season, they can do a little exchange gift. We give them documents we have, and they give us theirs, even without frontal shots.

***

AS we all know, Piatco played hardball with this cute administration.

It even walked away from negotiations with the former presidential adviser for strategic projects, Gloria Tan Climaco.

Its lawyers, coming from the Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc delos Angeles law firm, blocked the COA from looking into its books.

Even in the talks on "compensation" with the oversight committee of former DTI Secretary Mar Roxas, Piatco refused to open its books.

Now, for the sake of those of you who are going to pay for all the foolishness in the government, meaning, all of you taxpayers out there, the auditors of Piatco are none other than the KPMG Laya Mananghaya & Co.

But don't get me wrong. I am not saying that they should tell us what they know, because I really don't know what the auditors are trying to hide, este, do to help us.

PCCI chief sees bright garments prospects

By Michelle V. Remo

THE COUNTRY'S garments industry stands to gain from the lifting of the quota system in January 2005, according to Noemi Saludo, the newly-elected president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Saludo, who is also president of garments-exporting firm Philippine Integrated Exporters Inc., said in a briefing yesterday that while some members of the garments sector were apprehensive over the adverse impact on the industry of a quota-free regime starting 2005, the PCCI believed that it presents an opportunity for the garments exports exporters to explore more markets.

Saludo took over as PCCI chief from Sergio Ortiz-Luiz, who was named PCCI chair.

The World Trade Organization mandated the lifting of the quota system for garments exports on member-countries by 2005 but China's quota exports to the United States would be lifted only in 2008 as stated by the bilateral trade agreement between the two countries.

The United States is the country's largest foreign market for garments, accounting for the industry's $1.6 billion worth of exports.

As of September 2003, the Philippines has generated $1.9 billion in revenue from its garments exports to quota countries, which include the United States Canada and members of the European Union.

The European Union accounted for $263 million of the country's garments exports, while Canada accounted for $54 million.

Brand A
Brand B
Brand C
Brand D
Brand E
Brand A
Brand B
Brand C
Brand D
Brand E
Canon
Printer
Canon
Digital Camera / Digital Video Camcorder
PictBridge
Exif Print
i455
i475D
i560
i865
i905D
CP200
CP300

Canon
CONNECTS

New Canon PictBridge Photo Printers
connect directly to any PictBridge-compatible
Digital Camera or Video Camcorder!

Canon was the first to offer Camera Direct, allowing you to connect your Canon Digital Camera directly to your Canon printer. Now, Canon's latest photo printers feature PictBridge, a new industry standard that allows any PictBridge-compatible digital camera or digital video camcorder to be directly connected. The quality and convenience of Canon photo printers are now available to all. Make a direct connection with the new Canon iSeries printers, which produce MicroFine 2 picolitre ink droplets for exceptional detail. Coupled with 4800 x 1200dpi, speeds of up to 23 ppm monochrome / 16 ppm colour, and loads of creative software, the iSeries is your bridge to exceptional digital photographs. Or you can connect to the portable CP dye-sublimation printers to get instant photographs. Whatever digital camera you use, now you can cross the bridge to Canon digital photo perfection. PictBridge...no barrier!

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2pl ink droplets
· Up to 4800x1200 dpi resolution
Up to 18ppm mono/12ppm colour

i475D
2pl ink droplets
· Up to 4800x1200 dpi resolution
Up to 18ppm mono/12ppm colour
Card Direct printing
(8 types of memory cards)

i560
2pl ink droplets
· Up to 4800x1200 dpi resolution
· Up to 22ppm mono/16 ppm colour
· 4 colour inks (Think Tanks)

i865
2pl ink droplets
· Up to 4800x1200 dpi resolution
· Up to 23ppm mono/16ppm colour
· CD-R printing
· 5 colour inks (Think Tanks)

i905D
2pl ink droplets
· Up to 4800x1200 dpi resolution
· Up to 8ppm mono/7ppm colour
· CD-R/Card Direct printing
(8 types of memory cards)
· 6 colour inks (Think Tanks)

CP200
Portable & compact
· Prints 4R, 3R, card & sticker labels
· Fast printing in just 85 secs (4R)
Superb photo-quality prints with dye-sublimation technology

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Portable & compact
· Prints 4R, 3R, card & sticker labels
· Fast printing in just 85 secs (4R)
Superb photo-quality prints with dye-sublimation technology
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PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 19, 2003)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	5,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	17	17.5	17	17.5	6,000
Bank of the Phil. Islands	46	46.5	45.5	46	732,300
Citystate Savings Bank	15.5	15.5	15.5	15.5	2,800
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	34	34	34	34	3,600
Export and Ind. Bank Inc.	0.52	0.53	0.51	0.53	3,200,000
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	27	27	26.5	26.5	339,000
Philippine National Bank	25	25	24.75	24.75	28,000
Security Bank Corp.	15.5	15.75	15.5	15.75	14,500
Union Bank of the Phil.	26	26	26	26	5,000
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
ATR Kim Eng Fin. Corp.	2.22	2.3	2.22	2.3	30,000
Bankard Inc.	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	5,000
First Abacus Financial	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32	1,800,000
First Metro Invest. Corp.	150	179	150	179	350
Manulife Financial Corp.	1710	1710	1710	1710	310
Sun Life Financial Inc.	1310	1310	1310	1310	1,430
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	25	25.5	25	25	18,300
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	0.68	0.69	0.68	0.69	70,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	825	850	825	850	80,460
Ipeople Inc.	0.91	0.92	0.91	0.92	110,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	1,000,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp.	2.65	2.65	2.65	2.65	2,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	0.89	0.91	0.89	0.91	9,990,000
Phil. Telegraph & Tel. Co	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	100,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	920	945	920	930	108,370
Philweb Corp.	0.011	0.011	0.01	0.011	16,700,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	14.75	15	14.75	14.75	173,800
Manila Electric Co. B	24	24	24	24	2,189,200
Petron Corp.	2.2	2.22	2.2	2.22	2,610,000
Trans-Asia Oil And Energy	0.93	0.94	0.93	0.94	440,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	1.32	1.34	1.32	1.34	470,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3	1,225,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Engineering Equip. Inc.	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	370,000
Supercity Rlty Dev. Corp.	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	10,000
Union Cement Corp.	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	313,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2	43,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	17.25	17.5	17.25	17.25	752,900
RFM Corp.	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.67	240,000
San Miguel Corp. A	54	54	53.5	54	9,700
San Miguel Corp. B	62.5	63	62.5	63	3,500
Universal Robina Corp.	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.4	21,000
Vitarich Corp.	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	420,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.34	190,000
Abacus Con Res & Hdg B	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.34	20,000
Ayala Corp.	5.2	5.3	5.1	5.3	6,478,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	3.15	3.15	3.15	3.15	200,000
Alliance Global Group Inc.	11.75	11.75	11.75	11.75	600
A. Soriano Corp.	0.83	0.84	0.83	0.84	490,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006	3,000,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	10	10	10	10	1,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.47	0.49	0.47	0.48	6,370,000
Basic Consolidated Inc.	0.115	0.145	0.115	0.145	100,000
Southeast Asian Cement	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	1,200,000
Dmci Holdings Inc.	0.27	0.27	0.26	0.26	170,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	18.75	19	18.75	18.75	363,700
Global Equities Inc.	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	900,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	2	2	2	2	53,000
Macroasia Corp.	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	100,000
Medco Holdings	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	200,000
Megaworld Corp.	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	2,770,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	2,950,000
Music Corp.	0.35	0.35	0.35	0.35	560,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.98	400,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.34	0.34	0.34	0.34	10,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Matsushita Elec Phil Corp.	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	6,000
Pryce Corp.	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	200,000
SPI Technologies Inc.	12.75	13	12.75	13	339,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp.	0.58	0.58	0.56	0.56	850,000
Fairmont Holdings Inc.	0.23	0.24	0.23	0.24	450,000
Premiere Ent. Prod. Inc.	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	100,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (Pdr)	25	25.5	25	25	261,000
PLDT (10% Pref) Series S	11.25	11.25	11.25	11.25	1,400
PLDT (10% Pref.) Series U	11.25	11.25	11.25	11.25	1,600
PLDT (10% Pref) Series V	11.25	11.25	11.25	11.25	1,300
PLDT (10% Pref) Series W	11.25	11.25	11.25	11.25	1,300
OTHERS					
Centro Escolar University	6.9	7	6.7	6.9	31,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	6	6.1	6	6	4,808,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	60,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.135	0.135	0.135	0.135	40,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.205	0.21	0.205	0.21	400,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.04	1.04	1.02	1.02	3,080,000
Highlands Prime Inc.	2.18	2.18	2.18	2.18	50,000
MRC Allied Ind. Inc.	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	30,000
SM Development Corp.	1.02	1.1	1	1.1	242,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	4,871,000
MINING					
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.98	100,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	100,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.3	0.3	0.28	0.29	12,620,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	3,000,000
Philex Mining Corp. A	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	600,000
Philex Mining Corp. B	0.41	0.41	0.41	0.41	2,040,000
OIL					
Imperial Res.	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	300,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.0028	0.0028	0.0028	0.0028	152,000,000

Survey: RP consumers . . .

From page B1

"While spending on non-essentials is up in the region, Philippine spending is among the lowest as we more evenly distribute funds between spending, reducing debt and saving," he said.

About 80 percent of the Filipino respondents said they were spending excess cash after covering essential items compared to the 89-percent regional average.

Nevertheless, Niles said the general growth in consumer spending in the region may be fueled by increased advertising, which grew by 30 percent for top 10 product categories in the first 10 months of October from a year ago.

DISCLOSURES

THE LISTING of 63,375,000 common shares of **Ayala Land Inc.** is set on Dec. 23.

* * *

LIBERTY Flour Mills Inc. received an order from the Securities and Exchange Commission granting its request for reconsideration. The SEC's order consequently sets aside its penalty.

* * *

ISLAND Information and Technology Inc. elected the following officers: Chiu Huang aka James Shih, chair of the board; Andres Lao Sr., president and vice chair; lawyer Roman Pacia, EVP and treasurer; and Serafin Linda, corporate secretary and assistant treasurer.

* * *

THE EXCLUSIVITY period given by **SPI Technologies** to PPM Ventures Limited has lapsed with the parties not reaching an agreement on the principal terms and conditions of PPMV's proposed tender offer.

* * *

FOR THE PERIOD Nov. 18 to Dec. 18, 58,174 shares were exercised and fully paid for under **Jollibee Food Corp.**'s stock option plan. This brings the number of treasury shares reserved and allotted for this plan to a total of 9,623,372 shares. ***Compiled by Armin Adina, PDI Research***

CURRENCIES

December 19, 2003 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.804246421	1.000000	55.337000
Japan	Yen	0.007479	0.009300	0.514600
United Kingdom	Pound	1.426492	1.773700	98.151200
Hongkong	Dollar	0.103579	0.128790	7.126900
Switzerland	Franc	0.643964	0.800705	44.308600
Canada	Dollar	0.60506	0.752332	41.631800
Singapore	Dollar	0.471699	0.586510	32.455700
Australia	Dollar	0.595606	0.740576	40.981300
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.133336	2.652590	146.786400
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.21446	0.266660	14.756200
Brunei	Dollar	0.470319	0.584795	32.360800
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000095	0.000118	0.006500
Thailand	Baht	0.020319	0.025265	1.398100
UAE	Dirham	0.218979	0.272279	15.067100
Euro	Euro	1	1.243400	68.806000
Argentina	Peso	0.271247	0.337268	18.663400
Brazil	REAL	0.27458	0.341413	18.892800
Denmark	Kroner	0.13433	0.167026	9.242700
India	Rupee	0.017711	0.022022	1.218600
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.211661	0.263179	14.563500
Mexico	New Peso	0.07159	0.089015	4.925800
New Zealand	Dollar	0.520683	0.647417	35.826100
Norway	Kroner	0.119752	0.148900	8.239700
Pakistan	Rupee	0.014065	0.017489	0.967800
South Africa	Rand	0.121418	0.150971	8.354300
Korea	Won	0.000676	0.000840	0.046500
Sweden	Kroner	0.110316	0.137167	7.590400
Syria	Pound	0.018175	0.022599	1.250600
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023689	0.029455	1.630000
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000504	0.000627	0.034700

MVP seen giving up PLDT post in '04

By Abigail L. Ho

HE is calling the shots now in the country's dominant telecommunications company, and he will continue to do so until he himself decides that it is time to go.

Reacting to talk that he would be booted out of dominant carrier Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co., PLDT president Manuel Pangilinan said nobody could tell him what to do, stubborn as he is.

However, he did say that the time to leave the Philippines so he could focus more on Hong Kong-based conglomerate First Pacific Co. Ltd., which he helped build into a regional powerhouse and where he now sat as managing director, was near.

"After having spent so many years in the Philippines and in PLDT, the time will come when I will have to give up (my post) to someone who can take care of the company. I've been thinking of 2004 to do that, but I don't have a specific time frame," he said in a briefing yesterday.

Last month, Pangilinan disclosed plans of stepping down as PLDT president and chief executive to focus more on First Pacific's operations in Hong Kong. Being managing director of the conglomerate effectively gave him the role of chief executive.

He admitted that the First Pacific board of directors wanted him in Hong Kong more often so he would be able to oversee operations more closely.

By next year, following the successful implementation of PLDT's management transition plan, he said he would be spending half of his time in Hong Kong and the other half in PLDT.

Pangilinan also reacted to reports that the First Pacific board's wish for him to stay in Hong Kong more often was laced with an ulterior motive—to move him away from PLDT and to keep him in the freezer in First Pacific.

"Stubborn as I am, who's going to tell me what to do? It's not true. The First Pacific board wants me to go back, to go back to lead and not (to be kept in the freezer). I have to go back there to prime the pump again," he said.

Another reason he said he wanted to go back to and focus on Hong Kong was to protect First Pacific's investment in PLDT. Last year, tycoon John Gokongwei attempted to buy into PLDT via a joint-venture agreement with First Pacific for the latter's 24.47-percent stake in the dominant carrier.

Pangilinan, together with the PLDT board of directors, thwarted the takeover attempt.

Now, armed with his two-pronged regional food and telecommunications strategy, he said PLDT was an important part of the whole scheme to propel First Pacific to the heights it reached during its heydays.

Pangilinan is now making the rounds of telecommunications firms all over Asia to further increase its foothold in the region.

Also, efforts to boost Indonesian noodle maker Indofood Sukses Makmur Tbk's share in the regional food market are underway.

He said Indofood was prepared to enter into partnerships with interested entities, including local food and beverage giant San Miguel Corp.

SPI, British firm fail to reach buyout deal

By Doris C. Dumlao

LEADING IT service provider SPI Technologies and a unit of UK-based insurance giant Prudential Plc. have walked out of a deal that would have divested control of SPI in favor of the latter for $84 million.

SPI, whose stock prices had fallen on the Philippine Stock Exchange before yesterday's disclosure that the deal was off, has also approved a buyback program to defend its share price.

SPI chief finance officer Francisco Suarez Jr. told the PSE yesterday that the board of directors had agreed to earmark P55 million for the share repurchase program.

He said the exclusivity period given by SPI to Prudential unit PPM Ventures Ltd. (PPMV) to allow the conduct of due-diligence and other activities had lapsed "with the parties not reaching agreement on the principal terms and conditions of said offer."

"As such, SPI does not anticipate a tender offer being launched by PPMV," Suarez said.

News on the potential tender offer had boosted share prices in the past.

PPMV is a leading source of private equity finance with some two billion euros under its investment portfolio. It specializes in medium and large buyouts and institutional purchases.

Notwithstanding the aborted deal, SPI said in a press statement that it had set the stage for further growth in 2004.

It announced that it has entered into a partnership agreement with KPMG's Forensic Technology Services group, allowing SPI to offer electronic data discovery to Fortune 500 companies and leading US law firms using the KPMG technology platform. SPI will also be the exclusive partner for all of KPMG's litigation coding requirements.

SPI also said it has secured major new contracts which should help the company expand its bottomline results.

For instance, SPI said its subsidiary, SPI Content Sciences, has bagged a contract with a major contract lender and insurance company in the United States, marking its entry into the insurance and financial services market.

SPI also said it has reached an agreement with a major scientific, technical and medical publisher on another significant backfile conversion project.

"MBA IN 1 DAY"
BY
DR. FRANK TORTORICE, M.D., F.A.A.P
www.setonhospital.com

One of the famous Internist/Family Medicine Physician/Pediatrician from San Francisco, California will be here as a note speaker on January 7, 2004 at The Shangri-la Hotel, Makati Philippines

* He is currently practicing at SETON MEDICAL CENTER, DALY CITY, CALIFORNIA
* He is a member of the San Francisco Medical Society
* Board member of the San Mateo Medical Society
* Diplomate, American Board of Internal medicine
* Diplomate, American Board of Pediatrics
*Member of the U.S. Society of Physician
* He graduated with honor at the University of Rome.
* Professor at the University of California, Davis

His interesting topics are:
I.) G.E.R.D.
II.)CHOLESTEROL
III.)DIABETES
IV.) FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE IN THE FIELD OF FAMILY PRACTICE.

The conference will start promptly at 12:30 p.m. Lunch will be served. Certificate will be given after the conference. Conference fee for Doctor/Physician for pre-registration will be PHP 2,000 and on site registration is at PHP 2,500. Please call 757-1916/17 for ticket reservations. We only accept cash or cashier's check.

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Content provider allays rate hike fears

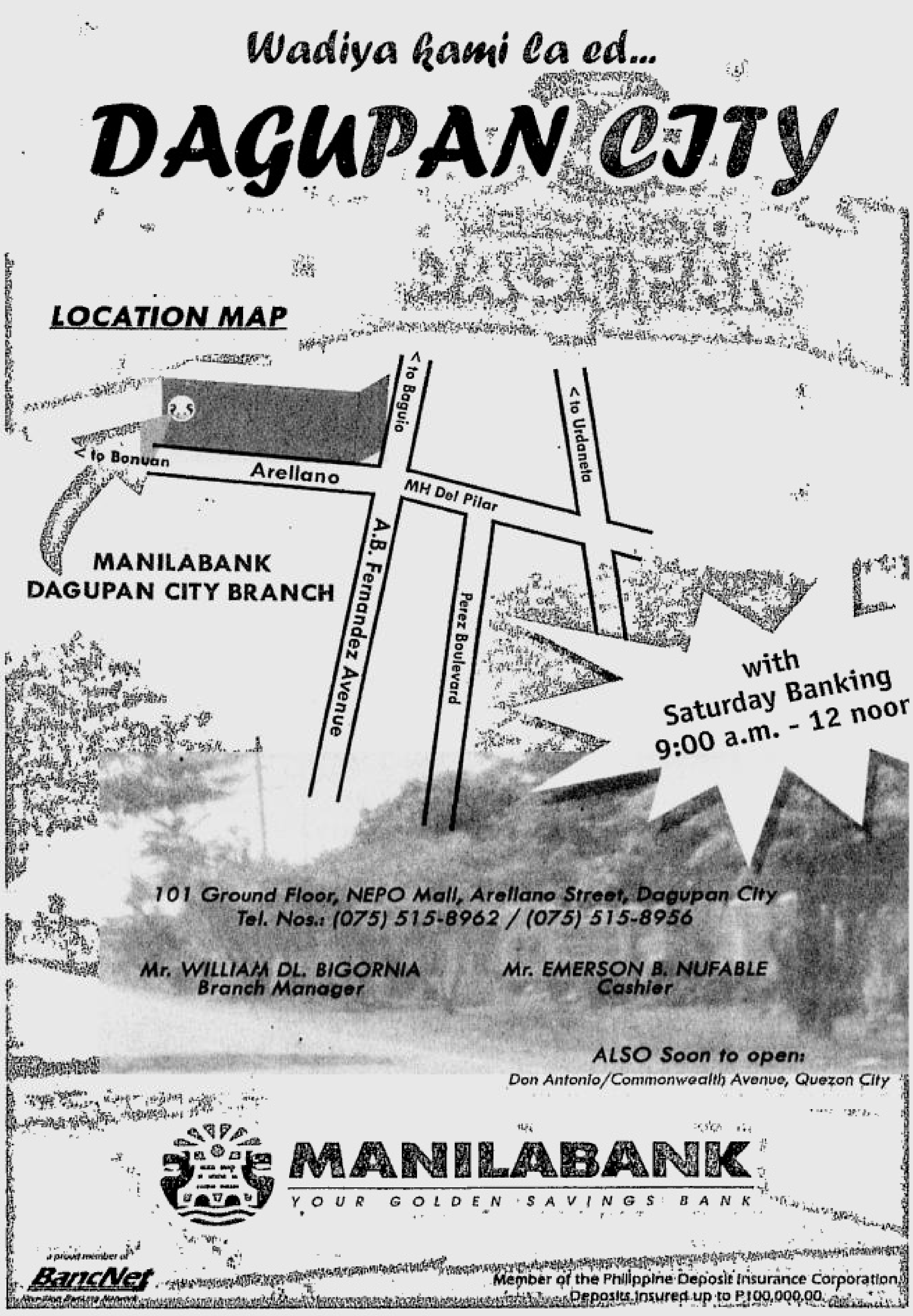
FOREIGN program provider Star Group Ltd. assured cable operators that there would be no programming rate increase of as much as 70 percent starting next year, although it did not discount the possibility that rates would be raised.

Star Group vice president for regional distribution May Oh said the claims of local cable operators group Philippine Cable Television Association (PCTA) that the program provider was jacking up its rates by so that much were "baseless and inaccurate."

Oh wrote the organization a letter in response to reports quoting PCTA vice president Philip Chien that, with negotiations for contract renewals now taking place between Star Group and local cable firms, the program provider had indicated that rates would be as much as 70 percent higher than those stipulated in their existing carriage agreements.

"Star and (ESPN/Star Sports) have not increased their rates in the last 18 months. The rate has remained the same from the time Star introduced the Star/ESS package in June 2002. In fact, this package price represented a 40-percent price cut from the previous ala carte rates," she said.

Abigail L. Ho



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Kabalikat sa Pabahay 2003 Awardees

Messages

MALACAÑAN PALACE

MANILA

Housing has been a centerpiece of our Administration's development agenda. By focusing on housing, we are able to respond to the need for shelter of millions of Filipinos as well as stimulate various housing related industries that contribute to economic growth.

The success of our housing program is evident in the lives of over 600,000 families who have been granted shelter security under my term. Through the ***Kabalikat sa Pabahay 2003 Awards***, we are giving long-overdue recognition to private companies, non-government organizations, local government units and other stakeholders who have been our most reliable allies in the war against homelessness.

I, therefore, extend my warmest felicitations to the men and women of the **Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC)** for holding the ***Kabalikat sa Pabahay 2003 Awards***. My congratulations, too, to the awardees and the other shelter agencies behind this undertaking. May you be inspired to continue your unwavering support to, and partnership with, the government as we carry out the task of providing decent and adequate shelter for our countrymen.

MABUHAY!

GLORIA MACAPAGAL-ARROYO

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

SENATE

MANILA

Congratulations to the **Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC)** on your first ever ***Kabalikat sa Pabahay Awards***.

The ***Kabalikat sa Pabahay Awards*** is an idea whose time has come. The outstanding private companies, organizations and local government units involved in housing deserve to be recognized for their valuable contributions to an important aspect of national development. And, as there is still much room for improvement in the housing sector, these awards will also serve to encourage others to strive for excellence.

My utmost compliments go to the winners—*mga totoong kabalikat sa pabahay*. May this well-deserved tribute to your work and your achievements serve as an impetus for you to continue the task of building decent shelter for our countrymen and ultimately building a strong nation.

Congratulations and Mabuhay!

SEN. FRANCIS N. PANGILINAN
Chairman, Committee on Housing

Republic of the Philippines

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Quezon City

My heartfelt congratulations to the **Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC)** and the other key shelter agencies for leading the industry in what can only be described as a new upsurge in the housing industry.

Without doubt, this unprecedented activity in the housing sector can only be attributed to a government that is serious in combating landlessness and homelessness in our country, and to a dynamic private sector receptive to policy and systemic developments.

The holding of the ***Kabalikat sa Pabahay Awards 2003*** is thus very timely. It not only recognizes the contributions of the different stakeholders toward making the housing industry what it is today, it also symbolizes a new era of active partnership between government, private sector and civil society.

Mabuhay!

REP. PROSPERO NOGRALES
Chairman, Committee on Housing
House of Representatives

Republic of the Philippines
Office of the President

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL

We in the government housing sector have always maintained that building homes for the Filipino and securing land tenure for the masses is not an easy task. It requires the combined energies and resources of government, private sector and civil society for access to appropriate technology, capital, project development, community organization, and end-user and developmental financing and guaranties.

The process may have been difficult and challenging, yet today, the housing sector counts among its accomplishments the creation of jobs and provision of access to services otherwise lacking in the absence of planned community development and planning. With housing, we have made a positive impact on the economy and on our people.

These awards – the ***Kabalikat sa Pabahay Awards 2003*** – is our way of recognizing the efforts and initiatives of all our partners in housing. It is our way of thanking and assuring them that we will continue to fulfill the Filipino dream of owning a home.

As we have all witnessed, there is no discounting the value of working together towards a common objective.

A toast to all. Mabuhay tayong lahat!

SEC. MICHAEL T. DEFENSOR
Chairman

Republic of the Philippines
Office of the President

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL

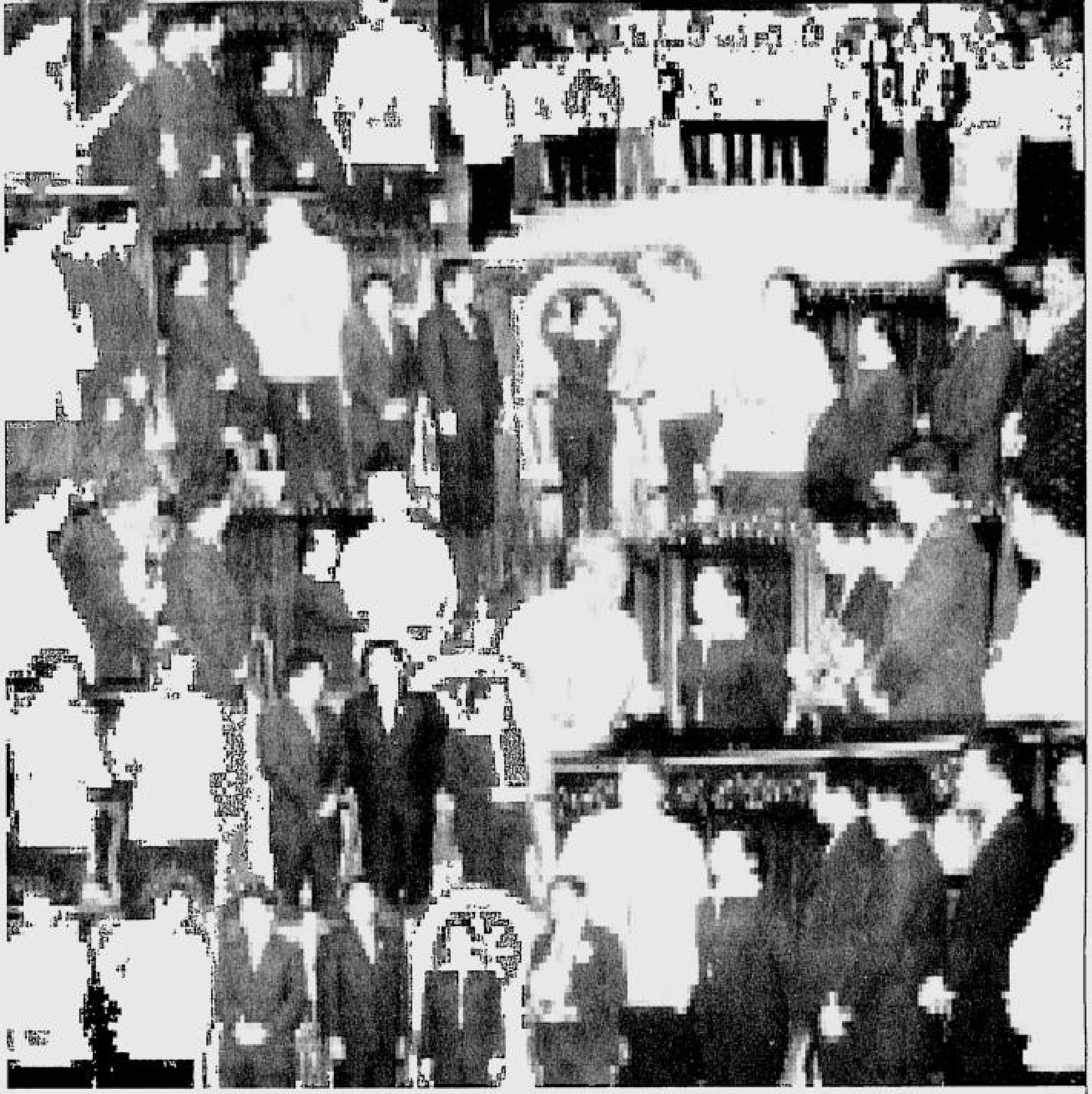
The ***Kabalikat sa Pabahay Awards*** is, first and foremost, a celebration of the spirit of collaboration that has moved the housing program to unprecedented heights under the present administration. It is not a competition between and among the various developers, banks, technology providers, local governments and non-government organizations to declare one as better than the others.

We are recognizing the efforts of all the stakeholders who have helped us, as exemplified by those whose outstanding achievements we are distinguishing through these awards.

The winners of these awards have been carefully selected based on the criteria set by the different shelter agencies, in coordination with the **Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC)**. We hope that this distinction will serve as inspiration for them and for their peers as we look forward to establishing the ***Kabalikat sa Pabahay Awards*** as a strong tradition and institution in the housing sector.

Congratulations to the winners, at Mabuhay tayong lahat!

USEC. ARMANDO A. DE CASTRO
Chairman
Kabalikat sa Pabahay Awards
Technical Working Committee



Winners of the Kabalikat Sa Pabahay Awards 2003

NATIONAL HOME MORTGAGE FINANCE CORPORATION

Outstanding Community Association – CMP Project

National Winner
Garcia Heights Credit Coop.,
Bgy. 19-B, Bajada, Davao City

Luzon
Villa Alfonso HOA Inc.,
Bambang, Pasig City

Visayas
Lahing-Lahing N-hood Assn., Inc.
Mabolo, Cebu City

Mindanao
Suraya HOA, Inc., Ph-1
Bgy. Cabantian, Buhangin District,
Davao City

Outstanding CMP Originator (Non-Government Organization)

Luzon
Foundation for Development Alternatives

Visayas
Pagtambayayong-a Foundation for Mutual Aid, Inc.

Mindanao
Assumption Parish of Davao Socio-Economic Development Foundation (APSED)

Outstanding CMP Originator – Local Government Units

LGU - Antipolo City
LGU - Bacolod City (Bacolod Housing Authority)
LGU - Cebu City (CCUP)
LGU - Marikina City
LGU - Pasig City

Special CMP Citations

LGU – Quezon City
LGU – Las Piñas
Provincial Government of Rizal

NATIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

Outstanding Community Association in High Collection, Land Tenure Assistance Program

Damayan Angela ng Antipolo Homeowners Association,
Antipolo City

Outstanding Housing Cooperatives

Bayanihan Credit Union, Inc.
Bulacan

San Francisco Government Employees Multi-Purpose Cooperative
Agusan del Sur

Outstanding Housing Technology Providers

Royal Ventures Construction and Development, Inc.
(Socialized Housing)

Laguna Properties Holding, Inc.
(Low-Cost Housing)

HOME GUARANTY CORPORATION

Distinguished Bank Partner of Government in Housing

Top Two Commercial Banks

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. (RCBC)
United Coconut Planters Bank (UCPB)

Top Two Savings and Thrift Banks

BPI Family Bank
RCBC Savings Bank

Citations

Philippine Rural Banking Corp.
Tahanan Mutual Building and Loan Association
Filinvest Land Inc.

HOUSING AND LAND USE REGULATORY BOARD

Leading Developer-Producer Based on Units Licensed by HLURB

Socialized Housing

Globe Asiatique Realty Holdings Corp.
Lifestyle Development Corp.

Economic Housing

HDL Construction and Development Corp.
(Region VI)

Open Housing

St. Catherine Realty Corp.
(Region III)

Condominium Development

Cityland Development Corp.
(National Capital Region)

HOME DEVELOPMENT MUTUAL FUND

Outstanding Group Land Acquisition Development Project

Luzon
St. Louis University - St. Vincent Parish Multi-Purpose Housing Cooperative

Bicol-Visayas
St. Charles Homeowners Association, Inc.

Outstanding Developer Category Small Developer (Below 500 units)

NCR (North and South)
Ceres Homes, Inc.
Marilao, Bulacan

Lakeside Nest Realty Inc.
Cabuyao, Laguna

Bicol-Visayas
Marag-ing Realty and Development Corp.,
Tacloban City

Mindanao
VS Homes
San Isidro, General Santos

Outstanding Developer Category Big Developer (500 units and above)

NCR (North and South)
Solar Resources Inc.
Novaliches, Quezon City

BANFF Realty & Development Corp.,
Trece Martires, Cavite

Luzon
Haus-Land Assets and Realty
(Regions I and III)

Bicol-Visayas
St. Rafael Development Corp.
Bacolod City

Mindanao
Francisco M. Soriano and Co., Inc.
Grande, Davao

DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR

Haus-Land Assets and Realty
(Regions I and III)

An expanding progressive company
is urgently in need of the following:

ACCOUNTANTS/ACCOUNTING CLERKS/ BOOKKEEPERS/CHEMICAL/ MECHANICAL ENGINEERS/TECHNICIANS/ FEMALE MARKETING ASSISTANT/ SALESMAN/INVENTORY CLERK/ EXECUTIVE/COMPANY DRIVERS

(with more than 10 years driving experience)

Qualifications:

- Preferably with working experience
- Computer literate/familiar with windows and office
- Hardworking, reliable and responsible
- Good moral character, work ethics and pleasing personality
- Proficient in English/Tagalog
- Good oral & written communication skills

Qualified applicant kindly send in your detailed resumé and transcript together with an inexpensive photo to:

Personnel Manager
P.O. Box 380
1502 Greenhills, Metro Manila, Philippines

HOPE
FOR CANCER CURE
FOUNDATION
kalayaan sa kanser...

presents two events that bind them all...

MIDDLE EARTH
RING HUNT
December 20, 1- 4:30 p.m.
Café Lupe,
EDSA, Guadalupe

and

THE LORD OF THE RINGS
THE RETURN OF THE KING
ADVANCE SCREENING
December 22, 6 p.m.
Teatro Aguinaldo
Camp Aguinaldo, Q. C.

both events will feature the street magic of ERIK MANA

(Subject for MTRCB Rating)

Café Lupe Family Restaurant
PAGCOR Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation
Inquirer News that makes a difference
Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office
Equitable PCI Bank Your Bank of Choice
Philam Foundation
Oishi
Palmolive Naturals
Tower Records
music one
Cofrutos
Informatics Computer Institute
SMINT
iACADEMY
Listerine
Pacific Internet
Pioneer Films
New Line Cinema A Time Warner Company
Smart
Globe Telecom
Pharmaton

For ticket reservations, call EVENTS CONSORTIUM INC. at 925-4972 or Milos at 724-1452

HCA celebrates family day with St. Benedict College

FREE treats from Honda Cars Alabang (HCA) showered St. Benedict College recently during the latter's Family Day Celebrations. Students from the nursery to the grade 6 levels and their families were treated to an exciting line-up of activities.

Honda's humanoid robot, ASIMO, was featured in the event. Other interesting activities included question and answer games on Honda's history, road signs and other Honda-related facts.

Meanwhile, HC Alabang Sales and service teams conducted free car diagnostics, vehicle display and test-drive. Honda car owners flocked the Honda team to avail of the said services.

The event was participated in by Shell Helix, 3m Scotchtint, OE Racing, SAVI, Tuff Kote, Nippon Kani, Keylargo and Disney Channel.

Honda Cars Alabang – together with Honda Cars Makati, Honda Cars Pasig, and Honda Cars Shaw – is a branch of Honda Cars Makati, Inc., a member of the Ayala Group of Companies.

ASSET MANAGEMENT GROUP
We manage for best value.
PNB

PUBLIC AUCTION

JANUARY 15, 2004 • THURSDAY • 2:00 p.m.
PENTHOUSE, B.A. LEPANTO BUILDING
PASEO DE ROXAS AVENUE, MAKATI CITY

- VALUE FOR MONEY DEALS
- GUARANTEED FINANCING
- FIXED INTEREST UP TO 10 YEARS
- 10% DOWNPAYMENT FOR LOTS
- 25% DOWNPAYMENT FOR DEVELOPED PROPERTIES

CAVITE

Lot 1 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 856 sqm
LOT 10 BLK 15 CITYVIEW 1 BRGY. KALINAWAN, TANZA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 372,000

Lot 2 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 200 sqm
LOT 12 BLK 19 CONNECTICUT ST, MANUELAVILLE SUBD., BUROL, DASMARIÑAS
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 618,000

Lot 3 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 1,000 sqm
LOT 40 BLK 7, RODEO COUNTRY ESTATE, BRGY MANGGAS, ALFONSO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,013,000

Lot 4 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 1,347 sqm
LOT 51 BLK 12, MANGA ST., GREENFIELD HTS, BUCAL, DASMARIÑAS
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,819,000

Lot 5 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 6,504 sqm
LOT 8414, BRGY ZAMBAL, TAGAYTAY CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 2,052,000

Lot 6 - LOT ONLY.
Lot Area: 1,000 sqm
LOT 10 BLK 10, RODEO COUNTRYSIDE ESTATE, ALFONSO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,200,000

Lot 7 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 925 sqm
LOT 12, BLK 6, RODEO COUNTRYSIDE ESTATE, ALFONZO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 981,000

Lot 8 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 1,000 sqm
LOT 17 BLK. 7 RODEO COUNTRYSIDE SUBD., ESPERANZA, ALFONSO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 840,000

Lot 9 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 1,000 sqm
LOT 19 BLK. 7 RODEO COUNTRYSIDE SUBD., ESPERANZA, ALFONSO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 840,000

Lot 10 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 542 sqm
LOT 1-B BISITA ST., BINAKAYAN, KAWIT
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 6,696,000

Lot 11 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 86 sqm Floor Area: 56 sqm
LOT 14 BLK 9, NARA ST, SHERWOOD HOMS, ANABU, IMUS
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 492,000

Lot 12 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 90 sqm Floor Area: 90 sqm
LOT 17 BLK 18-C, YAKAL, BULIHAN RESETTLEMENT PH 3, SILANG
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 410,000

Lot 13 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 88 sqm Floor Area: 31 sqm
LOT 24 BLK 33, SAINT CLEMEN ST. WINWARD HILLS SUBD., BUROL, DASMARIÑAS
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 316,000

Lot 14 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 380 sqm
Floor Area: 304 sqm
112 REAL ROAD, MALIKSI, BACOOR
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,809,000

Lot 15 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 97 sqm Floor Area: 75 sqm
LOT 56 BLK 58, WINWARD HILLS SUBD., PHASE 2, DASMARIÑAS
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 739,000

Lot 16 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 832 sqm
Floor Area: 78 sqm
271 COVELANDIA ROAD, BINAKAYAN, KAWIT
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,877,000

Lot 17 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 390 sqm
Floor Area: 156 sqm
LOT 31 BLK 1, DON GREGORIO HEIGHTS SUBD., BRGY ABUBOT, DASMARIÑAS
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,330,000

Lot 18 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 263 sqm
Floor Area: 51 sqm
LOT 1 BLK 6 FIREWOOD COR. EVERLASTING STS. STA CECILIA SUBD. MULAWIN, TANZA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 773,000

Lot 19 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 900 sqm
Floor Area: 150 sqm
LOT 1052-C-1 BO. TIMALAN, NAIC
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 810,000

LAGUNA

Lot 20 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 125 sqm
LOT 34 BLK 29, PHASE 1-D, GOLDEN CITY SUBD. DILA STA ROSA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 208,000

Lot 21 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 135 sqm
LOT 18978 BRGY. STA MARIA MAGDALENA SAN PABLO CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 368,000

Lot 22 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 175 sqm
LOT 3093-NEW-B-5 PH II, SPRINGHOMES SUBD., BUCAL
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 313,000

Lot 23 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 211 sqm
Floor Area: 468 sqm
LOT 1149-B, BO. POOK, STA ROSA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 3,558,000

Lot 24 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 240 sqm
Floor Area: 96 sqm
LOT 418-X-13-A-1, VILLA SOLEDAD SUBD., SAN CRISTOBAL CALAMBA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 740,000

Lot 25 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 136 sqm
Floor Area: 48 sqm
LOT 30-A, ST. CHRISTOPHER II ANNEX, BRGY. MAJADA, CALAMBA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 570,000

Lot 26 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 130 sqm
Floor Area: 49 sqm
LOT 3 BLK 2, VILLA ESTELA SUBD. BACLARAN, CABUYAO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 370,000

Lot 27 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 285 sqm
Floor Area: 88 sqm
LOT 25 BLK 18, ILOILO ST., SOUTH CITY HOMES PH2, STO TOMAS, BIÑAN
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 907,000

Lot 28 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 141 sqm
Floor Area: 60 sqm
LOT 32 BLK 2 DON PABLO SUBD, TAGAPO, STA ROSA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 765,000

Lot 29 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 376 sqm
Floor Area: 40 sqm
277 BRGY. LOOC, CALAMBA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 469,000

Lot 30 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 3,288 sqm
Floor Area: 88 sqm
LOT 245-C, # 92 CABALLERO ST., BRGY. SAMPIRUHAN CALAMBA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 4,124,000

Lot 31 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 200 sqm
Floor Area: 57 sqm
LOTS 11 & 12 BLK 5, RAYMUNDA AVE., MILLWOOD SUBD., PULO, CABUYAO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 719,000

Lot 32 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 180 sqm
Floor Area: 49 sqm
LOT 10 BLK 4 MA. JESUSA SUBD, BALIBAGO, STA. ROSA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 496,000

Lot 33 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 500 sqm
Floor Area: 42 sqm
LOT 23 BLK 4, BLISS HOUSING PACIANO RIZAL BAY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 477,000

Lot 34 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 235 sqm
Floor Area: 54 sqm
LOT 2-B-2-1-8 VILLA ESTELA SUBD. BACLARAN, CABUYAO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 636,000

Lot 35 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 180 sqm
Floor Area: 115 sqm
LOT 5 BLK 4, ABELARDO ST., CHRYSANTHEMUM VILL., SAN PEDRO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,104,000

Lot 36 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 582 sqm
Floor Area: 60 sqm
PUROK I, BRGY. TRANCA, BAY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 360,000

Lot 37 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 393 sqm
Floor Area: 88 sqm
115 PROVINCIAL ROAD, BRGY. MAITIM, BAY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 981,000

Lot 38 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 359 sqm
Floor Area: 77 sqm
LOT 7 DULONG YLAYA, MALABAN, BIÑAN
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 566,000

Lot 39 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 92.5 sqm
Floor Area: 56 sqm
LOT 16-B BLOCK 19 FLORIDA ST. SOUTHVILLE SUVD. CALABOSO, BIÑAN
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 479,000

Lot 40 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 267.95 sqm
Floor Area: 110 sqm
LOT 317-A 964 VALEJO ST. MALUSAK, STA. ROSA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 942,000

Lot 41 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 240 sqm
Floor Area: 69 sqm
LOT 2 BLK 7 BEGONIA ST. CERIS I SUBD. CANLUBANG, CALAMBA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 711,000

BATANGAS

Lot 42 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 462 sqm
LOT 5 BLK 2 ACELA HOMES SUBD., ANTIPOLO DEL NORTE, LIPA CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,478,000

Lot 43 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 165 sqm
LOT 2 BLOCK 4, AGASAKA ST. SAKURA EXECUTIVE SUBD. LIPA CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 464,000

Lot 44 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 801 sqm
LOT 847-B-3 INT. B. MORADA AVE. LIPA CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 3,405,000

Lot 45 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 1,142 sqm Floor Area: 137 sqm
OLD PROV'L ROAD COR BRGY ROAD, SITIO PAG-ASA, BRGY. PANTAY, CALACA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,353,000

Lot 46 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 115 sqm
Floor Area: 42 sqm
LOT 4 BLK 5, SAN ISIDRO VILLAGE, BATANGAS CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 589,000

Lot 47 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 115 sqm
Floor Area: 42 sqm
LOT 6 BLK 5, SAN ISIDRO VILLAGE, BATANGAS CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 589,000

RIZAL

Lot 48 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 350 sqm
LOT 18 BLK 4, CHELSEA ST., CATALINA 1, MISSION HILLS SUBD., MUZON, ANGONO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,389,000

Lot 49 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 350 sqm
LOT 13 BLK 4, CEDAR ST. CATALINA 1, MISSION HILLS SUBD., MUZON, ANGONO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,389,000

Lot 50 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 250 sqm
LOT 2-1-3, TICZON CMPD HERBAL PARK, P. OLIVEROS, ANTIPOLO CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 645,000

Lot 51 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 170 sqm
LOT 8 BLK 5, CRESTLINE RD., RIDGEMONT EXEC. VILL., SAN ISIDRO, TAYTAY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 461,000

Lot 52 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 270 sqm
LOT 4 BLK 2, COR. DALLAS & CAROLINA STS. GREENLAND NEWTON SUBD., BO. NANGKA SAN MATEO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 654,000

Lot 53 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 257 sqm
LOT 1 BLK 16, VOLVO ST. VILLAGE EAST EXEC. HOMES MUNTING DILAO, ANTIPOLO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 684,000

Lot 54 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 204 sqm
LOT 6 BLK 104, PAJERO ST., VILLAGE EAST EXEC. HOMES PH. 3, BRGY. MUNTING DILAO, ANTIPOLO CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 477,000

Lot 55 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 168 sqm
LOT 8 BLK 10, ANDROMEDA HOMES, BO. SAN ISIDRO, ANGONO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 296,000

Lot 56 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 72 sqm
Floor Area: 36 sqm
LOT 25 BLK 1, GREENROSE SUBD. PH 3, SAN RAFAEL, RODRIGUEZ
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 232,000

Lot 57 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 252 sqm
Floor Area: 103 sqm
LOT 11 BLK 4, #25 EDWARD VIII ST., KINGSVILLE SUBD., MAYAMOT, ANTIPOLO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,280,000

Lot 58 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 367 sqm
Floor Area: 291 sqm
LOT 3 BLK 13, FLORENS ST. SAN FRANCISCO VILL, MUZON TAYTAY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,856,000

Lot 59 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 330 sqm
Floor Area: 129 sqm
EMERALD ST, FRANCESCA HOMES, CAINTA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,369,000

Lot 60 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 481 sqm
Floor Area: 180 sqm
LOT 7 BLK 19, #22 CRUZEIRO ST, MERALCO SUB, TAYTAY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,949,000

Lot 61 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 295 sqm
Floor Area: 187 sqm
LOT 6 BLK 12, # 111 SUNRISE DR, BROKSIDE HILLS SUBD., CAINTA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 912,000

Lot 62 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 206 sqm
Floor Area: 151 sqm
#23 RIAL ST. MERALCO VILLAGE, SAN JUAN, TAYTAY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 871,000

Lot 63 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 150 sqm
Floor Area: 73 sqm
LOT 15 BLK 6, EMERALD ST, PINES CITY ROYALE, ANTIPOLO CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 623,000

Lot 64 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 204 sqm
Floor Area: 182 sqm
LOT 26 BLK 40, #23 LANCIA ST., VILLAGE EAST EXEC HOMES, ANTIPOLO CITY
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,771,000

Lot 65 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 192 sqm
Floor Area: 103 sqm
#32 SUNFLOWER COR MORNING GLORY STS., GREENLAND EXEC VILL PH IV-B, CAINTA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,129,000

Lot 66 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 240 sqm
Floor Area: 192 sqm
LOT 5 BLK 4, 4TH ST., PLEASANT HOMES, STO NINO, ANGONO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 727,000

Lot 67 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 74 sqm
Floor Area: 101 sqm
LOT 21 BLK 2 HOMEPOINT VILL SUBD SAN ISIDRO ANGONO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 551,000

Lot 68 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 74 sqm Floor Area: 42 sqm
LOT 20 BLK 2 HOMEPOINT VILLAGE SUBD SAN ISIDRO ANGONO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 260,000

Lot 69 - TOWNHSE
Lot Area: 60 sqm Floor Area: 53 sqm
LOT 8 BLK 13, HOUSE MAROON, RICHGATE SUBD, MAMBUGAN, ANTIPOLO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 603,000

VALENZUELA

Lot 70 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 137 sqm
LOT 40 BLK 17, MAIN AVE. COR. 22ND ST., METRO VILLA SUBD., MAPULANG LUPA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 521,000

QUEZON CITY

Lot 71 - LOT ONLY
Lot Area: 300 sqm
LOT 31 BLK 70 YUAN ST., NORTH FAIRVIEW SUBD., PHASE 8
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,212,000

Lot 72 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 352 sqm
Floor Area: 390 sqm
LOT 4 BLK 7, NO. 19 TRINITY ST. MARIES VILL., TANDANG SORA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 5,063,000

Lot 73 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 180 sqm
Floor Area: 99 sqm
LOT 2 BLK 3 RUBY ST. SAN PEDRO 6 TANDANG SORA
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,135,000

Lot 74 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 335 sqm
Floor Area: 302 sqm
L12F1, #2 PONCIANO BERNARDO ST., BAGONG LIPUNAN, CUBAO DIS.
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 2,010,000

Lot 75 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 329 sqm
Floor Area: 121 sqm
#14 ORANGE ST, ODELCO SUBD, SAN BARTOLOME, NOVALICHES
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,245,000

Lot 76 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 232.7 sqm
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L20 B83, #38 INT J. ZOBEL, DIOQUINO Z.OBEL, PROJECT 4
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Lot 77 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 1,010 sqm
Floor Area: 51 sqm
16-A INT FIDELCRUZ ST. TS CRUZ SUBD. NOVALICHES
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,316,000

Lot 78 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 252 sqm
Floor Area: 140 sqm
LOT 4 BLK 4, 15 CHOPIN ST., GREENVILLE SUBD., SAUYO, NOVALICHES
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,360,000

Lot 79 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 181 sqm
Floor Area: 76 sqm
39 SAN IGNACIO ST., BGY. GULOD NOVALICHES
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 732,000

Lot 80 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 447.7 sqm
Floor Area: 205 sqm
NO 21, DON JOSE ST., BRGY SAN ROQUE, CUBAO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 5,500,000

MANILA

Lot 81 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 73.7 sqm
Floor Area: 196 sqm
B14/L1-E, HERBOSA EXT. TONDO
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 1,215,000

MAKATI CITY

Lot 82 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 324 sqm
Floor Area: 108 sqm
1 PONTE ST. M. DELA PAZ SUBD. BRGY SINGKAMAS
Minimum Bid Price: PhP 4,600,000

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Lot 83 - LOT & IMPRVMNT
Lot Area: 174 sqm
Floor Area: 114 sqm
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Bid Documents can be obtained from the Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC) Secretariat at Room 163 16th Floor, The Columbia Tower, Ortigas Avenue, Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila during regular office hours from December 15 to 22, 2003 upon payment of a non-refundable fee of FIFTY THOUSAND (P50,000.00) PESOS.

Site inspection will be held from December 19, 22 and 23, 2003. For purpose of clarifying issues, a pre-bid conference shall be held on **December 29, 2003** at 2:00 p.m. at the above address. Deadline for the submission of bids shall be on January 19, 2004 at 10:00 a.m. also at the above address and shall be publicly opened immediately thereafter.

The determination of qualification shall be based on the non-discretionary "Pass-Fail" criteria concerning requirements on bidder's experience, technical and financial capability, as well as completeness of submitted documents.

DOTC and LRTA reserve the right to reject any of all bids or parts thereof, without assuming any obligation whatsoever to offset expenses or losses the Bidder may incur in the preparation of its bid, and will entertain only such bid established to be most advantageous to the DOTC and LRTA.

(Sgd.) **JOSE L. CORTES, JR.**
Chairman, Special Bids and Awards Committee

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Her husband **Renato Dequito**; loving children **Deborrah, Doreen & Leonardo, Dorcas & Zosimo, Leslie & Roma**; grandchildren, relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her body lies in state at Fr. Willman Chapel of Holy Trinity Memorial Chapels, Sucat Road, Parañaque City.

Interment will be on Tuesday, December 23, 2003 at 10:00 a.m. at Everest Hills Memorial Park, Susana Heights, Muntinlupa City.

MARK JOSEPH ECHAVEZ LEWIS

April 26, 1978 – Dec. 01, 2003

His parents **Albert & Daylin**; brothers **Vincent & Philip**; sister **Abigail**; relatives and friends request readers to pray to God Almighty for the eternal rest and peace of his soul.

His body lies in state at Funeraria Paz (Sucat). Interment will be on Sunday, 21 December at the Manila Memorial Park (Sucat) after the 0900H mass which will be held at the main chapel.

There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.
A time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant...

To Commemorate the
FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY
of

Norma Tuason Chua

(March 15, 1946 – December 20, 2002)

Mass will be offered for the eternal repose of her soul
on Saturday, 20 December 2003
at the following churches:

Monasterio de Santa Clara – Katipunan Road, Quezon City	5:00 a.m.
Santuario de San Antonio – Forbes Park, Makati City	6:15 a.m.
National Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes – Retiro Street, Quezon City	6:30 a.m.
Malate Catholic Church – Malate, Manila	7:00 a.m.
Saint John Bosco Parish – Arnaiz Avenue, Makati City	7:30 a.m.
Santo Domingo Church – Quezon Avenue, Quezon City	12:00 noon
Christ the King Church – E. Rodriguez Boulevard, Quezon City	6:00 p.m.
Santuario de San Pedro Bautista – San Francisco Del Monte Ave., Quezon City	6:00 p.m.
Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel – New Manila, Quezon City	6:00 p.m.
Saint Andrew the Apostle Parish – Bel-Air, Makati City	6:30 p.m.

Her loving husband, **Eddie**, and daughter, **Eileen**, request the relatives, friends, and people whose lives she has touched to offer a prayer for her soul.

Her family also conveys sincere appreciation and gratitude to all who sympathized, remember, offer mass and prayers and keep **Norma** alive in their memories and hearts.

"Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord.
And, let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace. Amen"

"For God so loved the World, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have Everlasting life."

—John 3:16

HERNANDO P. BERNABE

Peacefully joined our Creator on December 16, 2003 at the age of 82.

Loving wife: **Marina**; children: **Pilar & Ben; Zenaida & Manny; Rene & Baby; Mario & Des; Amy; Lilia; Gloria; Romeo & Helen; Ariel & Julie** and grandchildren.

His body lies in state at Boy Santiago Funeral Homes, San Mateo, Rizal.

Interment will be on Sunday, December 21, 2003 at 10:00 a.m. at Forest Lawn, Montalban, Rizal.

ROSARIO MORA PERALTA

Died on December 16, 2003
at the age of 86.

Her body lies in state at Chapel 2, Loyola Memorial Park Marikina.

From children **Ligaya, Ronald, Lorna, Reggie** and **Leila.**

Atty. Juanito "Amang" L. Angeles, Sr.

of Baliwag, Bulacan

Peacefully joined our Lord on December 14, 2003 at the age of 71.

His bereaved wife **Pacing**; children **Arnel** & wife **Lucina Violago, Juanito Jr., Ruel** & wife **Heidi Valdes, Waldo** & wife **Beth Buhain** and **Jerry**; grandchildren **Louis, Anton & Ysabel**, other relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at the Angeles Family residence at 270 F. Vergel De Dios Street, Baliwag, Bulacan. Interment will be on Sunday, December 21, 2003 at Gateway to Heaven Memorial Cemetery, Baliwag, Bulacan after the 2:30 p.m. Mass at the Immaculate Conception Chapel.

ATTY. LUIS E. LOZANO

Peacefully joined the Lord
on Monday, December 15, 2003 at the age of 87.

He is survived by his wife **Rosalia**; and children: **Linda & Dick, Leila, Ledda & Terry, Lizette & Rolando** (†), **Levita & Gerry, Luis Chito & Eloise, May & Wayne, Lani June, Lojila & Norman, Lalaine & Butch**; sisters: **Lagrimas** (†), **Leticia, Lerma**; brother: **Leonardo**; grandchildren & great-grandchildren, nephews & nieces request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

The body lies in state at the Funeraria Paz, Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

Interment will be on Monday, December 22, 2003 after the 10:00 a.m. Mass.

Please pray for the eternal repose of the soul
of our beloved father, grandfather, uncle and friend

ENRICO A. CALAÑGI

who died peacefully on December 18, 2003 at the age of 81.

He now joins his beloved wife **Fe Filipina Floresca** (†), and son **Archie** (†) and will be lovingly missed by his other children **Marilyn Mesina, Zandy, Larry, Grace** and **Zarah Davis**, sons and daughters-in-law, grandchildren, grandchild-in-law and great grandchildren.

His remains now lie in state at Chapel I, La Funeraria Paz, Araneta Avenue. Quezon City.

Cremation will be on December 23, 2003, 7:00 a.m. at Paz Crematory.

ASUNCION VERA USERO VDA. DE UBALDE

(Beloved widow of District Engr. Casiano T. Ubalde of Viga, Catanduanes)

Peacefully joined her Creator
on the 18th of December at the age of 92.

Her children Engr. Marino & Erlinda, Capt. Aventino (†) & Leah, Dr. Hidelita & Dr. Victorino, Ma. Consuelo & Abraham; Cesar (Joker), Atty. Susan & Camilo, Felipe & Esther (†), Rodolfo (Bobet), sisters-in-law Felina and Concepcion, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and other relatives request the pious reader to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her body lies in state at the family residence, #79A Aguho St., Project 3, Quezon City.

Interment will be announced later.

CLASSIFIEDS

Rice self-sufficiency is national security

NATIONAL Food Authority Administrator Arthur C. Yap said that attaining the country's rice self-sufficiency is ensuring national security.

Yap made this reaction in response to the article of Dr. David Dawe, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) economist which said it would be better for the Philippines to import than to aspire to have self-sufficiency in rice.

He noted that the country's drive towards rice self-sufficiency is basically fueled by the fact that rice is the staple food of Filipinos.

It is also a major component in the daily budget of Filipino families, comprising 12 percent of the consumer price index.

Thus, according to him, producing the commodity within the country is important, not just to secure the livelihood of two million rice farmers, but also to safeguard the entire nation's food security.

"While imported rice is cheaper, every sovereign country like the Philippines should protect its own sources of supply and not depend too much on other countries," Yap noted. He also cited the Philippine experience in the early '70s and early '80s when the country's and world production dipped to very low levels wherein even as the country had money to buy rice, exporting countries would not sell because they were also protecting their own food security and buffer stocks.

Citing that rice is a unique commodity in the international market where only about 4-6 percent or about 20 to 25 million metric tons (MMT) is traded, Yap said any sudden surges in demand causes large increases in prices.

He also warned that the Philippines may end up paying higher prices for rice if it becomes too dependent on scarce supply from outside sources.

Along this line, he pointed out that the government is working towards attaining sufficiency in rice at levels that are also globally competitive, or where the nation's costs of production would approximate the world's production cost.

This he said is the focus of the program Ginintuang Masaganang Ani by the agriculture department encouraging the use of certified and hybrid seeds to increase the average yield of rice farmers. These programs of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, under the leadership of Agriculture Secretary Luis P. Lorenzo, Jr. are envisioned to give farmers better income from palay production as the increased productivity reduces the cost of production, Yap said.

NFA sustains aggressive palay procurement

THE National Food Authority is taking advantage of sufficient budgetary support and the good weather to maximize its palay buying operations that has enable the agency to procure some 3.42 million bags of palay for the past two and a half months.

NFA Administrator Arthur C. Yap noted that with the agency's aggressive palay procurement, it was able to buy more than 50 percent of the 5 million bags it targets to buy until the main harvest ends.

Procurement for the main harvest starts from October until December but at times spills over until the middle of January to accommodate late harvests production.

Yap informed that the NFA is targeting to buy 8.6 million bags of palay for this year. The NFA has allocated P3.7 B in procurement funds for the last three months which could buy close to 7 million bags.

With the NFA buying aggressively, the average daily palay procurement even went up to as high as 80,993 bags in November, Yap added. "In areas where production is high like Occidental Mindoro, in Southern Tagalog, we even need to ship out palay to Batangas to decongest our warehouses and accommodate the farmers bringing in their produce", said Yap.

He also noted that Southern Tagalog consistently bested all other regions in NFA's palay procurement with 2 million bags bought from January todate.

This is in addition to buying 859,278 bags in November which is also the highest among the regions.

Aside from Southern Tagalog, the Ilocos Region also recorded high procurement volume with 1 million bags of palay bought from January to December, about half or 468,354 bags of it were bought in November alone.

Western Visayns meanwhile had already exceeded its procurement target for the year with 767,481 bags procured from January todate as against its target of 635,750 bags for the period. The region also surpassed its target volume for November with total procurement of 154,120 bags compared to its 138,500 bags target Yap noted that the NFA's aggressive buying provides stability in the prevailing ex farm price of palay recorded at P8.82 per kg on a nationwide average.

To sustain its active palay buying until the end of the month, the NFA has already put in the pipeline a total of P276 M ready for remittance to its provincial and regional offices. The NFA also opened a total of 530 warehouses and buying stations nationwide aside from fielding mobile procurement teams especially in far flung production areas and where heavy procurement is going on.

SCIENCE/HEALTH

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FLU SEASON AGAIN

Kids, elderly, pregnant women at risk

By Charles E. Buban

IT often strikes whenever the weather gets colder, like now. Even its name hints at this pattern—coined in the 18th century from the Italian phrase *influenza di freddo*, which means "influence of the cold."

There is no actual treatment once a person falls ill due to influenza, or the flu, but nearly everyone gets over it as the body mounts its own defense against the virus that causes it. For most people, influenza is just an inconvenient illness that inflicts a week or so of misery.

Ordinarily, the flu is not that deadly, but when it starts to result in deaths, authorities have a reason to get worried. No one wants to relive the horrors of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 that killed between 20 and 40 million people.

Fujian flu

For this reason, the World Health Organization is closely monitoring the Fujian strain, a type of influenza A (H3N2) virus responsible for 75 percent of current flu cases in the United States and most flu outbreaks in Finland, France, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Canada and the United Kingdom.

One of the key factors for a pandemic is when a certain virus bears surface proteins that people's antibodies have never encountered before. This means people have no natural defense against it.

Authorities, however, assure the public that the Fujian strain identified in this year's outbreak has changed only slightly from previous ones. Thus, the population it infects still has some natural immunity from encounters with previous flu strains.

The Department of Health says that despite public concern over the rapid spread of the Fujian strain abroad, there is still no evidence to suggest this strain is more virulent than others that have caused epidemics in the past.

At present, the flu is not yet widespread in the Philippines. And there were only 25 flu cases caused by the Fujian strain recorded from January to October this year. No deaths were reported.

Just the same, the DOH is reminding all high-risk groups—the elderly, pregnant women, very young children, and people with underlying health conditions (asthma, diabetes, heart disease—to be extra careful.

"Practical measures are still the main defense against the flu. People should remember to cover their mouths when coughing and sneezing, and avoid close contact in crowded places with people showing these symptoms," Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit says.

"If you have these symptoms, stay home, rest and recover. If you're already sick, drink plenty of liquids and do not take antibiotics," Dayrit adds.

Health experts also remind parents not to give aspirin to their children who have the flu because its use has been associated with Reye's Syndrome. Reye's Syndrome can cause vomiting, convulsions, brain damage and even death.

Children can safely be given acetaminophen for fever.

Vaccine

"Influenza is arguably the most unpredictable of viruses as it continually mutates or changes, making people susceptible to the flu throughout their lives," Dayrit says.

Even flu vaccines do not provide a guarantee against the flu.

"It only reduces your chances [of getting infected] and lessens the severity of the illness should you become sick," Dayrit says.

"However, having a proper diet and adequate exercise and rest can help fight off the disease."

Telling a cold from flu

Some people think the flu is just a worse version of a cold, but it's important to recognize the symptoms of both.

Although both are caused by viruses that infect the respiratory tract and both can cause symptoms such as coughing and a sore throat, a cold is just a minor viral or bacterial infection of the nose and throat and can occur during any season.

Health experts explain that colds rarely cause a fever, headache, extreme exhaustion or aches and pains. Its most obvious symptoms are a stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat and a mild-to-moderate cough.

Flu symptoms emerge suddenly and include a high-grade fever (38 to 40 degrees Celsius), headache, severe aches and pains, tiredness, weakness and chest discomfort or coughing, says Dayrit.

Although there is no treatment for the flu, doctors make sure they immediately address its life-threatening complications such as pneumonia, ear infection, bronchitis, chronic lung disease and fever-related convulsions.

Dayrit says this is why the DOH keeps reminding the high-risk groups to take all the necessary precautions and deal with flu symptoms as soon as possible.

New drug offers hope when chemotherapy fails

By Tessa R. Salazar

WHAT is more important: the length of life or the quality of life?

Every day, cancer patients struggle to answer this question. Who doesn't want to live longer and be with his loved ones longer? But with cancer, extending one's life can also mean prolonging the pain and agony and one's feeling of helplessness.

One of the main goals of cancer specialists for their patients, especially for those with advanced stage 4 cancer, is no longer just to seek that "miraculous" cure but to offer palliative measures—extending the patients' lives and possibly improve the quality of life along with it.

When chemotherapy fails, the last treatment option for Filipinos who suffer from inoperable or recurrent nonsmall cell lung cancer (NSCLC) is a new cancer drug called Gefitinib (marketed as Iressa by AstraZeneca).

Major breakthrough

Filipino oncologists present during the drug's Philippine launch a few weeks ago said the drug represents a major breakthrough in the treatment of lung cancer.

They noted that unlike other cancers, NSCLC is usually discovered in its late stages and when prognosis is already bleak, with patients' lives measured in months, not years.

In clinical trials using Gefitinib, however, approximately one-third of patients were still alive one year after taking the drug. Oncologists also observed that the quality of patients' lives improved with the use of Gefitinib.

"If, for example, you undergo chemotherapy but half of the time you are bedridden or you cannot function well or you suffer from nausea or vomiting or loss of appetite, what is the quality of life there?" asked Dr. Francisco Vicente F. Lopez, a medical oncologist and bone marrow transplant specialist.

He said his patients who took Gefitinib haven't showed up in his clinic for the past one-and-a-half months now.

"They're probably traveling somewhere, enjoying life," Lopez said.

Quick-acting

Patients taking the drug said they felt an improvement in their condition in just a week after they first took the medicine. No severe side effects often associated with standard chemotherapy treatments for NSCLC have been reported. The most adverse side effects reported with Gefitinib are skin rashes and diarrhea.

A 250-mg pill is taken once daily. But like other cancer medications, Gefitinib does not come cheap at P3,490 per pill.

However, Dr. Conrado Lorenzo III, chief of the medical oncology section of the Asian Hospital, said the newer chemotherapy agents can also cost as much in the long run. Chemotherapy administered at least twice a month costs about P60,000 per cycle. This does not yet include hospitalization costs and medication to control side effects.

Testimonial

One patient who benefited from Gefitinib is Dr. Soledad N. Balein, a 77-year-old psychiatrist. She was diagnosed with NSCLC in April 2002. In her last CT scan last July, her physician told her that Gefitinib was working well.

Balein said Gefitinib is a "convenient" drug. "I go on vacation and just carry it with me. I feel safe and I know I am going to feel better for a longer time."

Gefitinib shows further promise, according to Dr. Gerardo H. Cornelio, a medical oncologist at the Philippine General Hospital.

"We looked at other malignancies, and it is surprising that Gefitinib seems to target epidermal growth factor receptors, or those types of cancers that are resistant to chemotherapy. This is actually a very promising drug," he said.

Hurting and healing, naturally

DISCOVER

Massie Santos Ballon

THIS is for dawn, because she couldn't wait to see "Return of the King," and for Strider and Arrow, because they're always with her.

Back in October, I wrote about the work done by Naomi Eisenberger and her colleagues at the University of California at Los Angeles and Macquarie University in Australia which showed how emotional pain and physical pain affect the same parts of the brain and make a person feel the hurt.

This theory explains why there are so many products in the market designed to act as chicken soup for the heart and mind—ranging from scented oils and candles to comfort foods like chocolates and ice cream. These emotional painkillers are always popular because they provide the feeling of comfort that causes a person's brain to release specific opioids called endorphins, chemicals that interfere with the pain messages in the body.

Opioids in the body

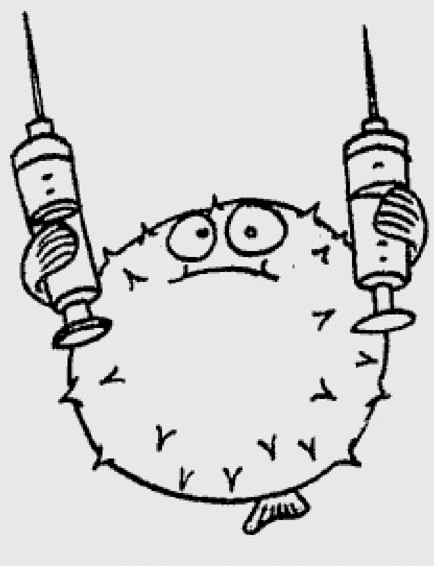
There are other opioids in the human body though, and when triggered, can cause a person to feel extremely happy. Unfortunately, these same opioids can be triggered by addictive drugs such as opium and morphine.

Because people want to feel happy, they keep taking the drug, and there are enough anti-drug programs out there that tell you why being addicted to drugs is bad. The challenge then is to wean the addict away from his drug of choice.

Unfortunately, withdrawing from the drug means the addict has to give up the happy feeling for bouts of pain, nausea and shaking. Recovering addicts will tell you this is not an easy decision to make, nor is it easy to commit to staying clean.

If only there was something addicts could take that would keep them pain-free long enough for them to want to stay drug-free.

Puffer fish



Wex Technologies Inc., a company based in Vancouver, thinks the answer to that problem lies in tetradoxin, the sodium channel-blocking toxin secreted by the fugu fish.

Also known as the puffer fish or blow fish, the fugu is probably best-known for being the Japanese delicacy you eat at your own risk.

Only specially trained chefs can prepare fugu, most of the toxins of which seem to be located in the sexual organs, which makes you wonder why they aren't extinct.

The chefs have to know exactly how to carve the fish without the poison seeping out onto the edible portions and risk killing the diner. If the diner ingests even a tiny amount of the toxin, he can be paralyzed within minutes.

One Japanese proverb says those who eat fugu are fools, and those who don't are fools—which sums up the world's fascination with this fish.

Several medications

Wex plans to market several types of medication made from tetradoxin.

There's the painkiller they're marketing under the brand name Tectin and is for people with chronic pain, such as those with advanced cancer. There's the nonaddictive natural painkiller called Tetrodin for those currently withdrawing from drug addictions. And there's the anesthetic called Tocudin for people who don't want to feel the pain of having their injuries treated but who want to keep an eye on their doctors just the same.

For those who are worried that producing these medications will mean the end of fugu on the dining table, the good news is that Wex can get several hundred doses of tetradoxin from a single fish.

And each injectable dose is some 3,200 times stronger than morphine, yet isn't addictive. This means patients could take smaller doses of medication and still be pain-free longer.

Profitable market

Since it began trials on its tetradoxin-based products, Wex has opted to focus most of its time and energy toward getting Tectin on the market as soon as possible because painkillers are more profitable given the larger target audience involved.

The Phase IIa clinical trials for Tectin involved 22 patients who reported feeling less pain up to two weeks after the drug was injected.

Proposals for Phase IIb and Phase III clinical trials, which would test the drug on a larger sample population, are currently being reviewed.

It's been said the drug development process for Wex's products is slow because it's associated with death and contains a natural poison rather than a synthetic chemical. It's a thought worth pondering given that Botox contains an equally deadly natural toxin that causes a prolonged and even messier death.

Maybe the real question is, why are we resorting to poisons to improve our lives? Have some chocolate cake while you think about it.

E-mail the author at massie@massie.com.

Christmas puzzles

EUREKA!

Queena N. Lee-Chua

IT'S time for our annual Christmas puzzle contest. Below are five brainteasers, which require no more than logic, arithmetic and persistence. OK, sometimes a bit of algebra may help, but formal knowledge is not required. Sharpen your pencils and your wits!

The five readers who will send complete and correct solutions will receive a copy of my latest book, "What Is an Eskimo Pi? Mathematical Strategies Revealed" (Anvil Publishing, 2003).

1. How can 7 added to 8 be 12? One reason could be that the number system used is base 13. However, what we are looking for here is a different digit to be substituted for each of the letters to give a correct addition. There are three possible solutions: find one of them.

```
SEVEN
+ EIGHT
----------
TWELVE
```

2. In a small town of 50,000 people, 42 percent of the males and 23 percent of the females married people from their own town. Assuming these numbers have remained constant over the years, how many males are there in the town? (Despite current trends, assume that each man has only one wife, and vice versa.)

3. My head and tail both equal are,
My middle slender as can be.
Whether I stand on head or heel
Is quite the same to you or me.
But if my head should be cut off,
The matter's true, though passing strange
Directly I to nothing change.
What am I?

4. Four gentlemen and their wives wanted to cross the river in a boat that held no more than two people at a time. A gentleman could not leave his wife on the bank without him unless she was either alone or only in the company of one or more women. Of course on each crossing, someone must bring the boat back. How did they do it? Describe in detail.

5. In 1937 a man stated that he was x years old in the year x2. He added, "If the number of my years are added to the number of my month, the result equals the square of the day of the month on which I was born." When was he born?

Results will be published in January. Send your solutions through e-mail at blessbook@yahoo.com or regular mail care of the Ateneo de Manila University, Math Department, Loyola Heights, Quezon City.

Merry Christmas!

Old sperm bad news for babies

RESEARCHERS at the University of Washington in Seattle have found that older men produced more sperm with highly damaged DNA.

They said this could help explain why older men were more likely to father children with birth defects, as well as to be less fertile than younger men.

The older men's sperm were also less likely to undergo a self-destruct mechanism called apoptosis, which is meant to get rid of damaged cells.

It may not be simply age that affects the sperm, but all the environmental damage that comes with age, the researchers said. While men produce fresh sperm daily, the organs that are involved in sperm production can be affected by smoking, chemicals, sunlight and lifestyle.

The president of the Society for Male Reproduction and Urology said men who were putting off fatherhood might want to consider their lifestyle choices to minimize their risk of infertility, or perhaps revise their timetables.

Reuters

MEDICAL FILES

When extended survival means prolonged agony

By Rafael R. Castillo, MD

ONE of the most emotionally taxing challenges a physician is confronted with is handling a terminally ill patient. Finding comfort in the final stages of a terminal illness becomes a more important goal than extending the patient's life by a few more days, or a few more weeks.

Advances in medical technology have greatly extended life, but the price of extended survival can be prolonged agony. To most patients and doctors, it might not be worth it anymore, and death is a better alternative, making some resort to euthanasia or "mercy killing."

Palliative care, or palliative medicine, is emerging as a better and more humane alternative for terminally ill patients. It compassionately and effectively alleviates the suffering of terminally ill patients, thereby making their lives not only tolerable, but also worth living, whatever is left of it.

For instance, majority of cancer patients—up to 90 percent—suffer significant pain. The goal of palliative medicine is to help control, and if possible stop, this pain even if it means resorting to aggressive treatments like morphine and other potent narcotic painkillers or radical interventions such as radiation chemotherapy or surgery.

Only evolving in RP

The word "palliative" literally means concealing or cloaking. In medicine, it describes care that alleviates extreme pain and suffering. Palliative medicine as a specialty is now well-established in Britain, but is only evolving in the United States and in the Philippines.

One of the pioneers in our country is Dr. Cynthia San Luis, who successfully completed a master's degree in palliative care, graduating with a merit from the King's College School of Medicine. There are only 50 worldwide and she is the only one from the Philippines who has completed this course. One of her mentors is the world-renowned authority in palliative care, Prof. Irene Hugginson.

Dr. San Luis was chosen from among several hundred applicants from developing countries and was awarded a scholarship. Upon her return to the Philippines, she founded the St. Michael's Hospice in Marikina City and set up a palliative care program at the Quirino Memorial Medical Center.

She is dead-set on her mission to propagate palliative care in the country.

"Since cure is no longer possible, we want to focus on the physical, psychological and spiritual concerns of the patients," Dr. San Luis stresses.

Holistic approach

Palliative medicine aims at treating symptoms using a holistic approach to the psychological, social and spiritual needs of patients, their families and healthcare givers. A wide range of clinical skills is needed, including communication, ethical decision-making, working with hospital and primary care colleagues and allied health professionals.

Other essential qualities are empathy and sensitivity to ensure team involvement. It is also important to have the ability to make a difference in decision-making processes for patients, families and staff usually at a most difficult time and often with an ethical dimension.

The concept of palliative care has broadened over time from "terminal care" to include care for people with life-limiting illnesses but are not imminently dying. This includes those with advanced cancer or other incurable diseases such as multiple sclerosis, AIDS and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) wherein patients are permanently hooked to their oxygen tanks, or in some cases, to their mechanical respirators.

Alarming studies

Palliative care proponents lament that the vast majority of dying patients receive no palliative care at all.

They point to alarming studies, like one recent Harvard survey, showing that nearly half of all medical students in their third year of clinical training had never observed a supervising physician talk with a dying person. Nearly three-quarters said they had never observed a surgeon tell a patient the bad news after an operation.

There is also an almost inconsiderate tendency to withhold potent painkillers from terminal cancer patients due to fear of drug addiction.

Studies however show that the prevalence of addiction is much lower than commonly thought of by doctors. Besides, for a terminally ill patient who only has a few weeks to live, the risk of drug addiction may no longer be relevant. Pain relief is more important for a patient who is so weak that sometimes even minor pains feel very severe and distressing.

When somebody is dying, the ethical decision is not whether to prolong life or not. The ethical decision is based upon the need to prevent or relieve suffering. For palliative care advocates, this is the most crucial thing, perhaps the most important thing to the dying patient.

ASK THE DENTIST

Paul R. De Castro, DMD

Brushing during parties

I GO to a lot of parties and office meetings where we eat and have lengthy conversations. I would like to brush my teeth after the meal but sometimes the topic is very engaging that I never find the time. Will my teeth suffer because of my negligence?

—Mayen O.

You are supposed to brush your teeth after every meal, but if the circumstances do not allow you to do so then you can instead drink a lot of water or eat foods that clean your teeth. After a meal you can eat an apple or an orange or some slices of carrots or cucumber or turnips. These foods are high in water and fiber; they clean your teeth and also promote fresh breath. You can also rinse your mouth with water when you go to the bathroom.

Your teeth will survive for now, but remember that this is just a compromise. You will need to brush later on and floss if you want to keep your teeth for the rest of your life.

E-mail your questions at dentalqs@yahoo.com.

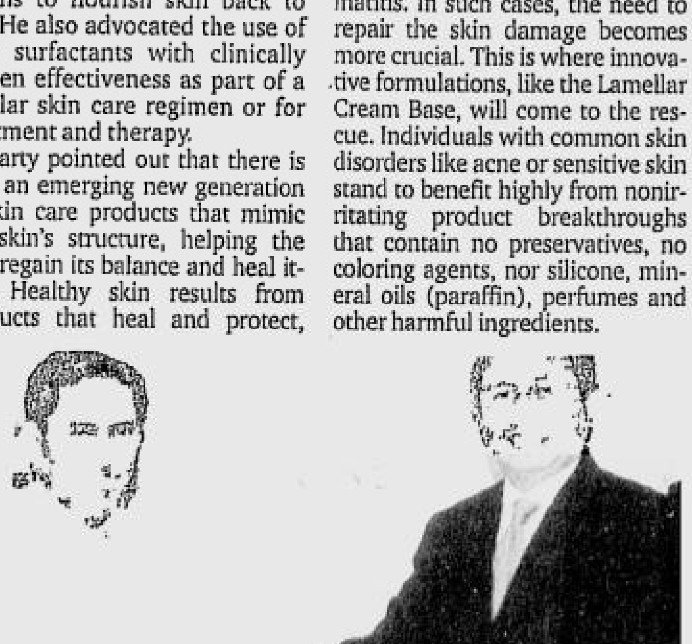
New skin care products help skin regain balance

WHEN it comes to skin care, less is more. This is the concept advocated by noted French pharmaceutical expert, Prof. Jean-Paul Marty, Ph.D., who was recently in Manila as guest speaker at the 27th annual convention of the Philippine Dermatological Society.

Professor Marty cited the need for new, original and safe formulations to nourish skin back to life. He also advocated the use of mild surfactants with clinically proven effectiveness as part of a regular skin care regimen or for treatment and therapy.

Marty pointed out that there is now an emerging new generation of skin care products that mimic the skin's structure, helping the skin regain its balance and heal itself. Healthy skin results from products that heal and protect, rather than disrupt, the skin's natural barrier. The skin's natural barrier, he explained, can be impaired by several factors like environmental pollutants, and exposure to strong solvents like soaps, detergents and emulsifiers.

The skin's permeability may also be disturbed due to scarring or pathological factors like atopic dermatitis. In such cases, the need to repair the skin damage becomes more crucial. This is where innovative formulations, like the Lamellar Cream Base, will come to the rescue. Individuals with common skin disorders like acne or sensitive skin stand to benefit highly from nonirritating product breakthroughs that contain no preservatives, no coloring agents, nor silicone, mineral oils (paraffin), perfumes and other harmful ingredients.



P.H.A.P. DONATION

PHAPCares Foundation, a socio-civic program of PHAP-member pharmaceutical companies, provided free supplies of life-saving medicines to combat the spread of cholera in Tondo. Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit receives the donation from Gerardo Bacarro, PHAPCares trustee and Pfizer president.

OVERWEIGHT?

C-Lium © Fibre is 100% psyllium husks, a pre-need and multi tasking fiber, and a natural fat absorber which helps reduce weight, helps eliminate constipation, helps regulate the bowel movement, cleans the colon and intestine of waste and toxins, helps reduce the risk of heart disease, helps remove cholesterol, helps control blood sugar and contributes to achieving well-being for the whole family.

100% NATURAL
AND ORGANIC
FIBER SUPPLEMENT
ALL NATURAL
NO ADDITIVES
NO SWEETENERS
NO CHOLESTEROL AND
GLUTEN FREE
GLYCEIMIC INDEX (GI) LOW

Solution for overeating

WORD OF MOUTH

Sandy Daza

WHEN the blue Xenical capsule first came out, it sold like hotcakes. It was the solution of many foodies for overeating.

Excuse

Believed to absorb and flush out fat, it provided an excuse for many to pig out. But it is no longer as hot as it used to be. So, foodies are still on the lookout for something that will ease the guilt of a food trip, or lessen fat intake.

Before a recent steak meal, a friend gave me an enzyme tablet and two fiber capsules. The enzyme helps digest the food faster and the fiber helps absorb the fat, and is supposed to flush it out. I wasn't totally convinced, but it wasn't bad.

Just a couple of weeks ago, someone told me about this new fiber called C-Lium Fibre. Mix about a tablespoon in a glass of juice or water and drink it, then follow it up with another glass of water. After a day, the results are unbelievable. I was so impressed with the fiber that I kept telling everyone about it.

Two glasses

Boy, it just cleans out your system. I was told that an experiment was done on it: They got two glasses half-filled with water, and added oil to both, which of course floated on top. Then they added a certain brand of fiber to one glass and added C-Lium to the other. The fiber in the first glass almost dissolved, while the C-Lium fiber absorbed the fat and swelled into a gel.

It doesn't claim to have any nutritional benefits, though. I don't really care as long as it absorbs the fat. And because it swells up, it gives one the feeling of being slightly full so that you eat less. For regularity of "visits," this is the perfect solution.

Other benefits

Other benefits: regulates movement, cleans colon and intestines, is a natural fat absorber, expels body toxins, lowers bad cholesterol (better than oatmeal), flushes out intestinal worms, relieves indigestion, treats colic and gastritis, eases abdominal bloating, reduces acidity, controls diarrhea and works like an intestinal broom.

This is what I have been looking for. Check it out! C-Lium Fibre is available at Mercury Drug. Get the five-sachet pack first and try it.

Happy eating!

For comments email sandydaza@shaw.ca

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Philippine Daily Inquirer December 6, 2003 Saturday

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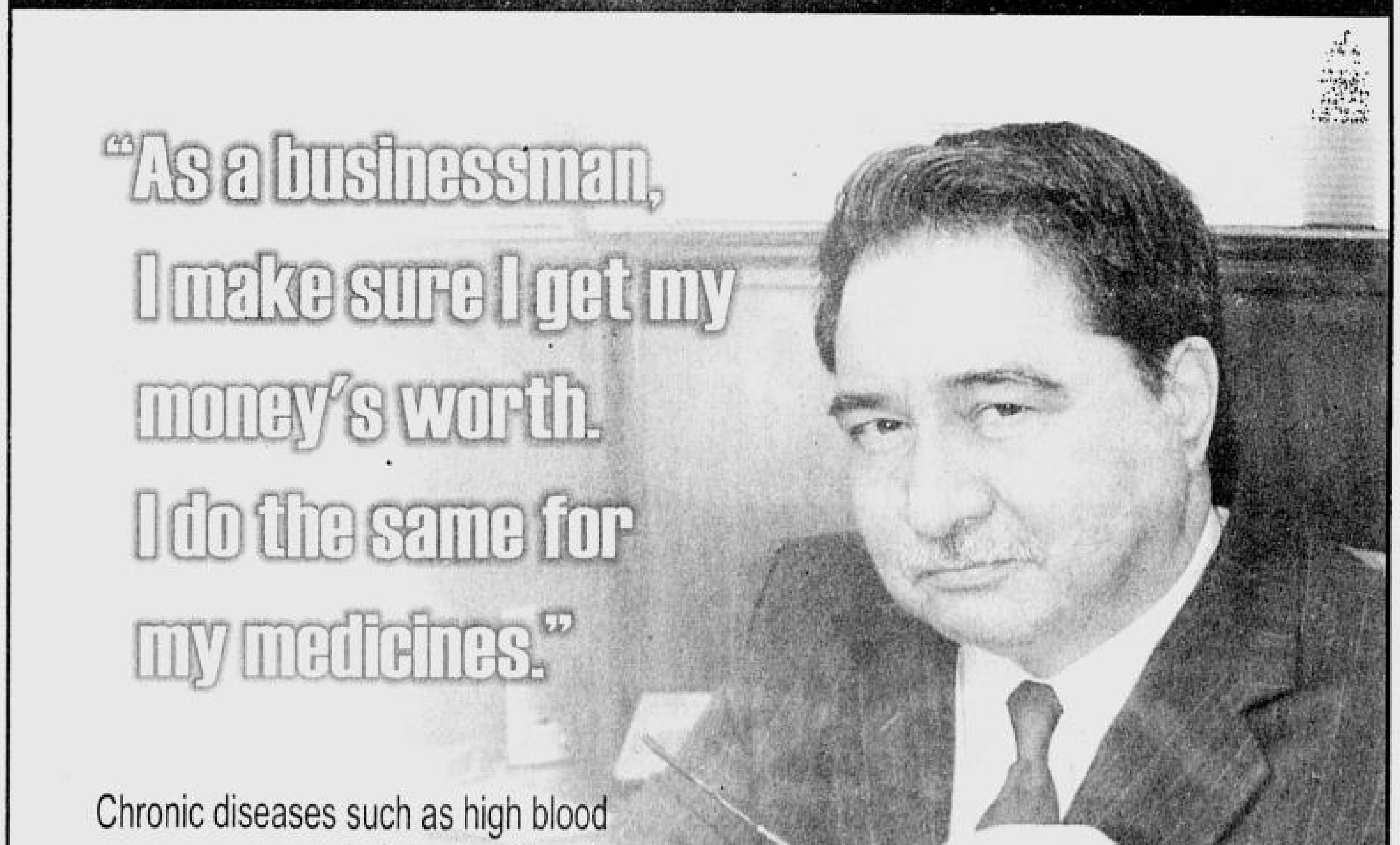

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Political woes may drag peso to 56 to $1 next year

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas yesterday said political uncertainties, which affect foreign investments and dollar inflows, could fall to an average of 56 to $1 next year.

BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura said the BSP was looking at a high end of 54 to $1 and a low end of 56 to $1 for next year. The projection was based on expectations that investments and dollar inflows would be waylaid by political concerns and questions on fiscal sustainability.

Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong, however, said that the government would substantially bring down the budget deficit this year to a level below the target of P202 billion. The government, she said, might even cut the P197.8-billion deficit ceiling in 2004.

The gap between revenue and expenditure stood at P172.204 billion as of November.

Amatong said the government could increase its foreign borrowings next year to address the BSP's concern that a 70-30 mix in favor of the local market could put undue pressure on the peso. The government has to settle about $2 billion in maturing loans in 2004 but would borrow only $1.8 billion from overseas.

The finance chief also said the government could go back to the offshore market soon to raise its remaining $750-million requirement for next year.

Buenaventura said increasing the level of the national government's foreign borrowings to sufficiently pay for maturing obligations could help ease the pressure on the peso next year.

The peso yesterday closed at 55.40 to $1, slightly lower from 55.355 last Thursday. Even after falling to a record closing low of 55.73 to $1 last month, the peso was expected to average at 54 to $1 this year.

Traders said that a 56 to $1 average would mean that the peso could fall to as low as 57 in the coming months.

The central bank said its peso outlook was based on the assumption that exports would grow by 10 percent and imports by 10 percent next year while foreign direct investments could hit $943 million. Inflation should average at 4-5 percent.

"We also assumed that the national government will use a 70-30 borrowing mix in favor of the domestic market. This is where we foresee some difficulties because using pesos to pay our dollar obligations could put pressure on the peso and to our external reserves," said the BSP chief.

4th quarter growth seen hitting 3.8-4%

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PHILIPPINES likely attained its 3.8-4 percent economic growth target for the fourth quarter on the back of stronger farm and services output, Economic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri said yesterday.

In his yearend briefing, Neri said the country was beginning to benefit from the rebounding global demand, which had translated to better export performance in the last few months of the year.

For the full year, however, export receipts are expected to grow by only 1.4 percent, slower than the 6.6 percent increase in the import bill.

"Economic fundamentals are supportive of a stable macroeconomic environment, although risks remain," Neri said.

Those risks, Neri said, stemmed from a higher-than-expected world oil prices and the uncertainties created by the forthcoming presidential elections.

But as long as there was no sharp policy reversals, Neri said the economy would stay resilient and the gross domestic product (GDP)—the total amount of goods and services produced by the economy—should grow by 4.9-5.8 percent next year.

He warned the public against policy changes that could reverse efforts to liberalize the economy, including measures that would discourage the entry of foreign investments, such as the reimposition of high tariff walls to protect favored industries.

Neri said the Philippines should reap the benefits of the recovery in world economic growth, normal weather conditions and election spending in the first half of 2004.

SSS collection up 15%

THE SOCIAL Security System, the largest pension fund in the country, yesterday said its financial health has been improving since it got a shot in the arm last March by way of a one percentage point increase in members' monthly contribution.

The SSS, which has roughly 25 million members nationwide, said in a statement its collection shortfall in the first 10 months of the year had narrowed to P760 million from roughly P4 billion in the same period last year.

"The gap between the contributions we collect and the amount we spend for benefit payments are closing, reflecting the improving financial condition of the SSS," pension fund president and CEO Corazon de la Paz said.

Scarred by 19 benefit increases and no contribution hike since 1980, the SSS' financial condition had deteriorated rapidly until President Macapagal-Arroyo finally acceded to De la Paz's plea to allow an increase in the monthly contribution of employers to 9.4 percent from 8.4 percent. This, together with the fielding of 343 new account officers and the piloting of a new teller system.

In its statement, the SSS said that members' contributions in the first 10 months increased more than 15 percent to P32.79 billion compared to the same period last year. Benefit payments showed a slower growth of 3.9 percent to P33.54 billion during the reference period. *Elena R. Torrijos*

Jollibee voted No. 1 in RP

HONG KONG—Jollibee Foods retained its No. 1 overall leadership position for the sixth consecutive year in the Far Eastern Economic Review's annual company survey, the Review 200: Asia's Leading Companies.

San Miguel Corp. and Ayala Corp. swapped positions in this year's poll to take second and third rankings respectively.

In the individual leadership categories, Jollibee took two of the five leadership polls for "innovative in responding to customer needs" and "companies that others try to emulate." San Miguel Corp. secured the "high quality services/products" leadership category while Ayala Corp. was voted as the top company with "long-term vision."

The full results of the survey, which is sponsored by DHL Worldwide Express, are available across the region in the Far Eastern Economic Review's New Year double issue.

Also included in the top 10 Philippine companies ranked for overall leadership were Globe Telecom, Smart Communications, Bank of the Philippine Islands, Ayala Land, Mercury Drug, GMA Network and ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.

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SATURDAY Special
Editor Nestor U. Torre ■ Assistant Editor Rito P. Asilo

Stars recall their merriest and bluest Christmas

By Jocelyn Valle

CUNETA. Happiest when her children were born.

YEAR in, year out, we wish each other a merry Christmas. But there have been times when we felt the happiest, and other times, the saddest. Here's how some stars remember their past Yuletides:

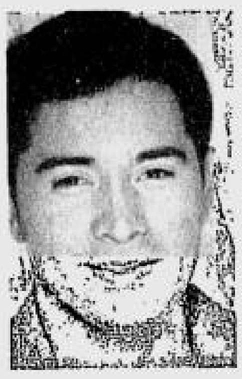
Sharon Cuneta

"The times when my kids (KC, 18, and Frankie, 3) were born were the merriest. We had this huge Christmas tree and there was Frankie underneath it, *ang* cute!

"The bluest was when my father died. Now, as in the past, we celebrate Christmas Eve at my mom's house. On Christmas Day, we go to my in-laws' house. This year, we'll be spending the rest of the holidays in Thailand."

Cesar Montano

"Celebrating Christmas during my growing-up years in Sta. Ana, Manila was the best! I would go caroling with my friends as far as Makati, Pandacan, Paco and Mandaluyong. I stopped in third year high school. *Dyahe na kasi.*



MONTANO. Caroling with friends.

"The bluest happened in Sta. Ana, too. It was New Year's Eve in 1986 when a fire broke out in our neighborhood. Our house was spared but we still felt sad. Imagine, at the height of joy and fun, there came fear—a total reversal of the situation.

"These days I try to make every day Christmas Day with my family. After all, the spirit of Christmas is about sharing and loving."

Bong Revilla

"The bluest, *noong mawala ang Mama ko.* It was in 1998, and our Christmas has never been as merry as it used to be. But we have to move on, we still try to be happy. *And'yan pa rin naman si* Daddy (Sen. Ramon Revilla), *malakas pa.*

"We celebrate the holidays with the whole Revilla clan—in my house in Alabang on Christmas, and in my father's house in Cavite on New Year's Eve."

Angel Aquino

"I don't recall the merriest, but one that's unforgettable was the time when my parents gifted me and my siblings with a family computer. It was sometime in the '80s. They were always fighting, but during that particular Christmas, *bati sila.*

The bluest also happened during the '80s. My mother didn't wake us up in time for *noche buena* because my father was away. She said there was nothing to celebrate anyway.

"My first Christmas away from my family was also sad. I had just gotten married, and we chose to settle in Baguio. Now, I try to keep the tradition that my mother has set, for my two girls this time."

Aiko Melendez

"The saddest was when I lost my dad (actor Jimi Melendez) in August 1998. The merriest was when I gave birth to my son Andrei, who's five years old now. It was September, so by December, there was a baby in the house.

"This is only the second time that I'll be celebrating Christmas as a single mother (her marriage to actor Jomari Yllana has been annulled). *Medyo malungkot, pero OK lang* as long as my son is healthy."

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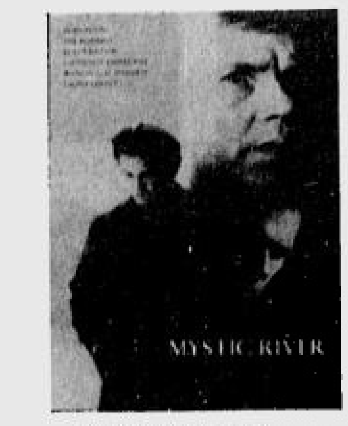

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Stars recall . . .

From page C1

Anne Curtis

"I've never had a blue Christmas. *Kasi,* it's when the whole family is together and everybody's happy. Of course, there are lots of gifts. In Australia, we used to open our gifts after lunch *pa* on Christmas Day. But very Filipino *pa rin ang* celebration. We also had *noche buena.*"

Ricky Davao

"The bluest was when we lost one of my sisters years ago. She died on Dec. 22 and she was buried two days later. The merriest is yet to come.

"I celebrate Christmas at home with my family. We have *noche buena* together. We go out only when there's an invitation to go somewhere else."

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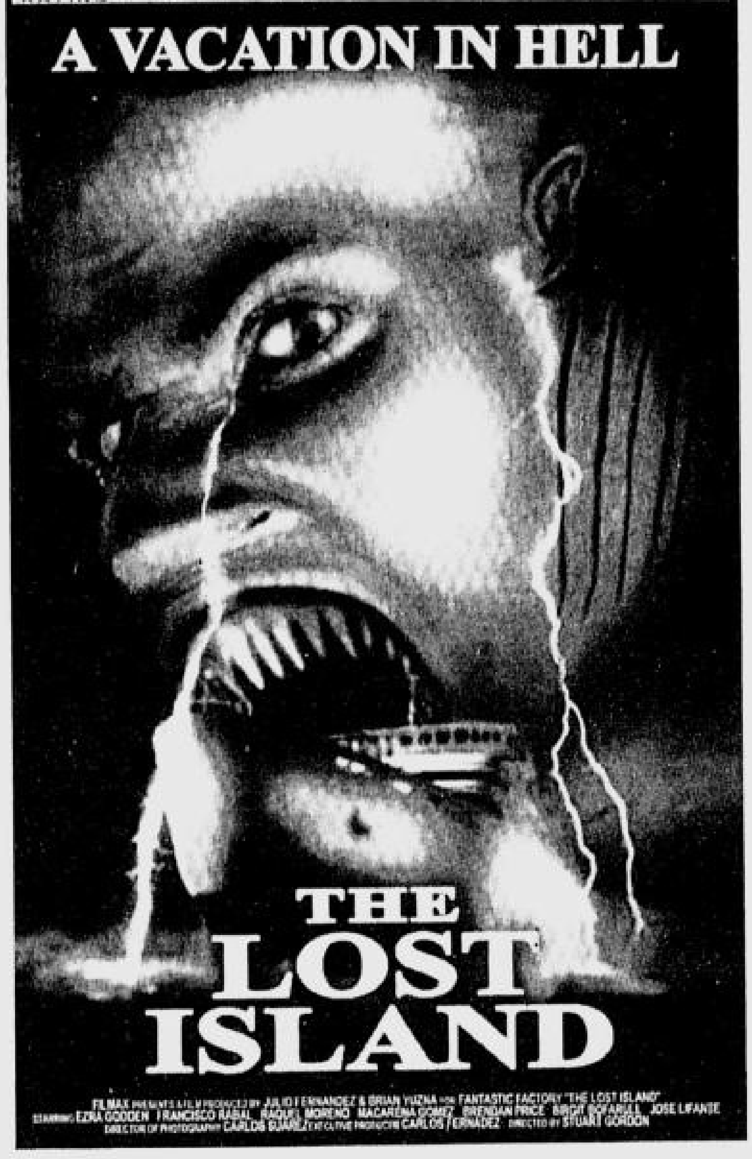
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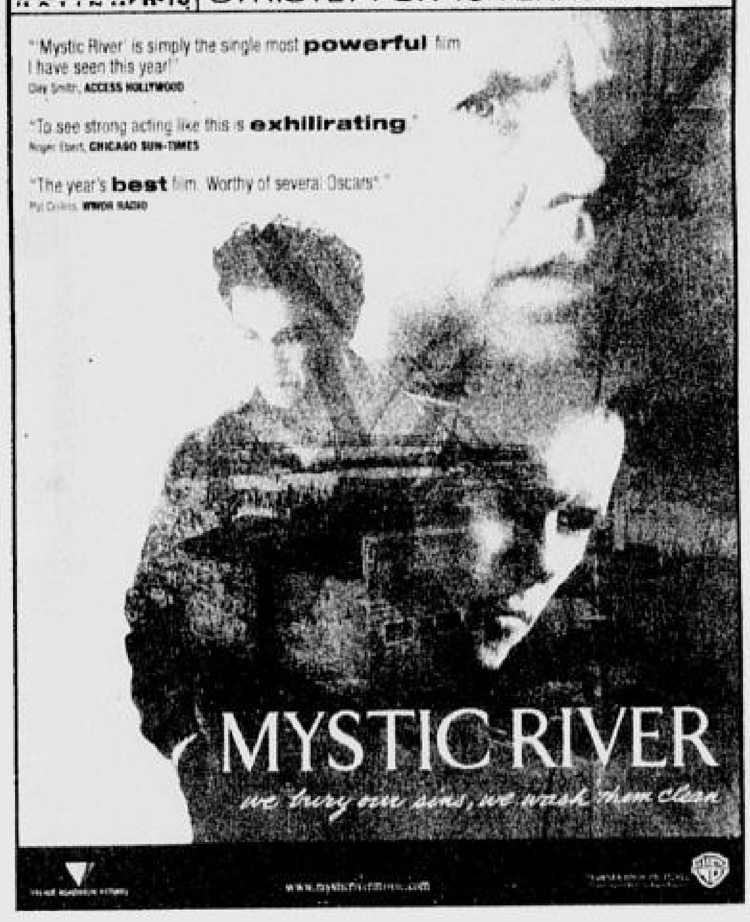
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Superheroes, other novel characters fly high in new film season

By Nestor U. Torre

SUPERHEROES will fly high on the movie screen next year, as new fantasy action-ers are unveiled by producers eager to latch onto the hit trend for everything it's worth.

Twin identities

In Columbia's "Spider-Man 2," Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) faces new challenges as he desperately tries to balance his twin identities as a college student and as a web-slinging superhero who can make champion rock climbers look like bumbling, bungling losers.

"Hellboy" introduces another young superhero in the person of a boy born in the flames of hell, but saved by a kind mentor, Dr. Broom. Raised in Broom's Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense, Hellboy (Ron Perlman) joins other unusual creatures endowed with fantastic powers.

They include the "Mer-Man" Abe Sapien; Liz Sherman, who can psychically control fire, and is his love interest in the film; and Myers, the FBI agent who's his rival for Liz's affections. Together, they must come to terms with both the positive and negative effects of their astounding powers.

Undercover agent

Finally, in "The Punisher," Thomas Jane plays Frank Castle, an undercover agent who has managed to beat considerable odds in the field. A former Special Forces operative, he is finally being transferred to a desk job—and a normal life with his wife and son.

But Castle's world is shaken to its core by a nightmare he has long feared: his family is executed as a repercussion of his final undercover assignment. With anguished intensity and resolve, Castle seeks to punish his loved ones' murderers.

Transition

More: Peter Pan isn't really a superhero, but he provides the transition between fantasy action movies about more real events and protagonists.

J.M. Barrie's "Peter Pan" is more excitingly brought to life on the silver screen with the help of new technological advances that enable director P.J. Hogan to splendidly recreate the fantastic visuals envisioned in the timeless children's novel.

These visual delights include Neverland, the fairies, Tinker Bell and shots of children flying through the air with the greatest of ease—well-loved images and cinematic dreams that are part of many people's childhood fantasies.

Beyond reality

"Gothika" also goes beyond reality to explore the mysteries of the human mind. In the psychological thriller, a criminal psychologist (Halle Berry) awakens to find herself a patient in her own mental institution, with no recollection of the murder she's been accused of committing. As she struggles to reclaim her sanity, she finds that she's become the pawn of a vengeful spirit.

Also out of the ordinary is the premise of "Fifty First Dates," Adam Sandler's latest comic charmer. Sandler is cast as Henry, a veterinarian in Hawaii who enjoys the company of vacationing women. But he leaves the playboy life behind after he falls for Lucy (Drew Barrymore).

Unfortunately, she suffers from short-term memory loss. Since she can't remember meeting him, Henry has to woo Lucy every single day—and hope that she finally falls for him!

ON Perlman lays title role in "Hellboy."

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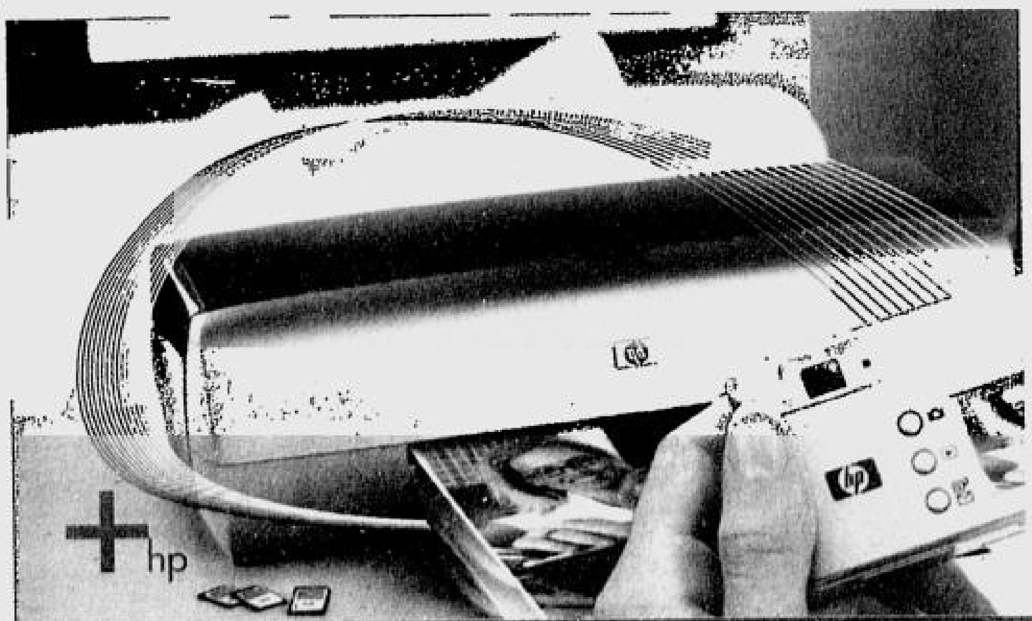
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Gifted newcomers showcased in latest 'Magsimula Ka' staging

By Nestor U. Torre

WHEN auditions were announced last month for the latest staging of Gines Tan's hit stage musical, "Magsimula Ka," both veteran and new singers and actors answered the talent call at the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

Well-known leads

The auditionees ranged from experienced singers who had performed in hit musicals in Europe, through some well-known leads of local theater shows, to completely inexperienced unknowns. The production welcomed all of them, and gave each auditionee his chance to demonstrate the range of his talents.

In the days and weeks ahead, those talents were developed to a level of competence that indicated which role would go to which performer. Consistent with the long-running show's reputation for making stars out of gifted newcomers, even the lead roles in the musical were open to the auditionees.

It was made clear to them, however, that they would have to meet the production's high standards, and prove that they deserved those plum parts.

The cast is now deeply into rehearsals, because the new production of "Magsimula Ka" will begin its performance tour on Jan. 27, 2004. Schools, organizations and communities interested in having "Magsimula Ka" performed in their locality are invited to contact CCP Outreach Tour's Sonny Cristobal at 833-0267 and 832-3674, and Andy Bais at 713-9323 and 0919 206-5424.

Artistic projects

The 2004 outreach tour is being mounted to bring the popular and critically-acclaimed show to different parts of the country, and to help raise funds for important artistic projects of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

"Magsimula Ka" has become popular with audiences because of its entertaining and creative combination of songs, dance, drama and comedy, and its affecting story about young college graduates who pursue and achieve their dreams, despite many setbacks.

It has also helped launch the flourishing entertainment and musical theater careers of exceptional talents like Robert Seña, Isay Alvarez, Jograd dela Torre and Gigi Posadas, some of whom have gone to play lead roles in musicals in London and other parts of Europe.

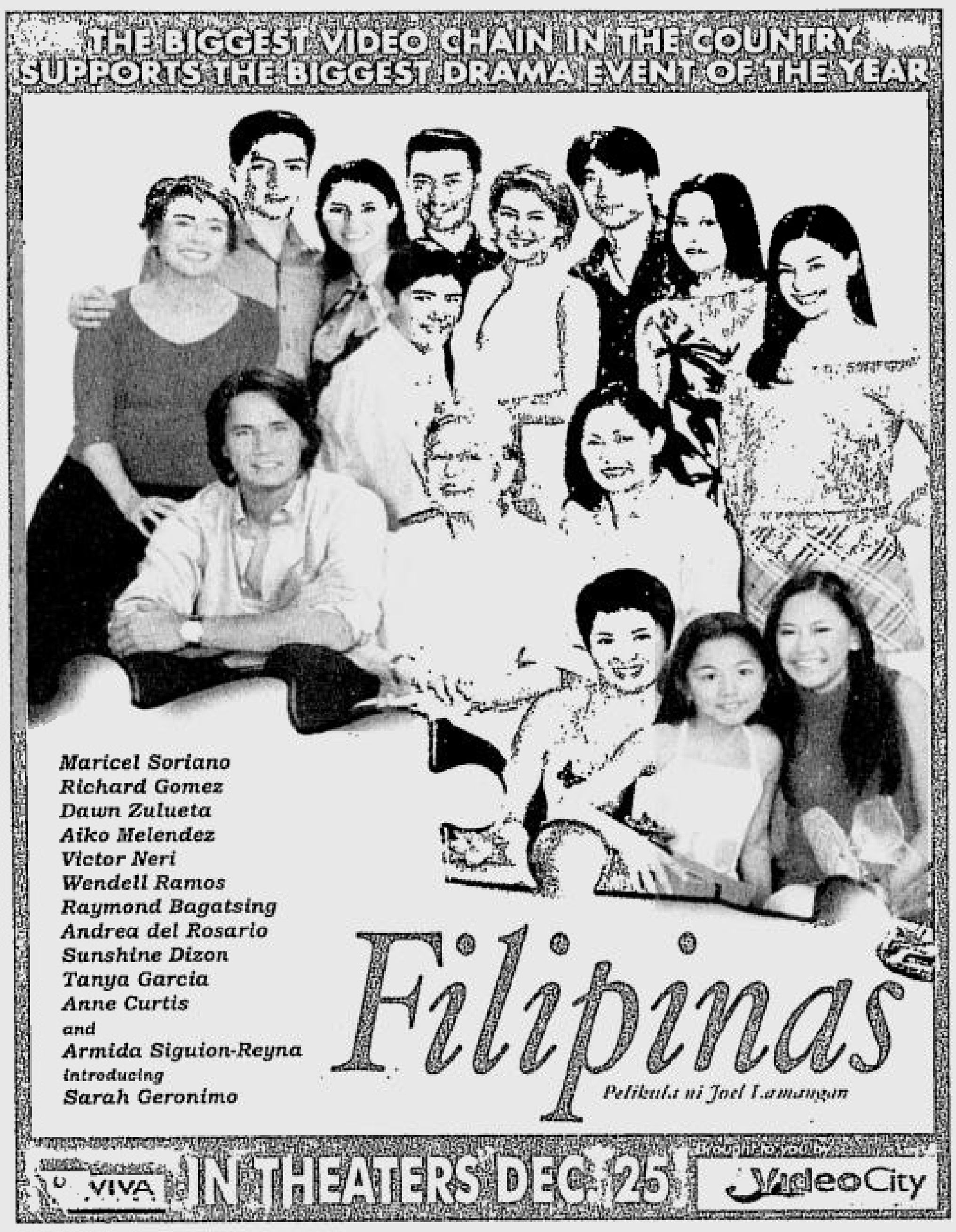
The musical's reputation for training and showcasing young talents has attracted a similarly talented new crop of singers, actors and dancers who also want to develop their potential to the fullest despite the difficult process involved.

Male lead role

They have been heartened by success stories like the "Magsimula Ka" talents who were tapped to join the cast of "Miss Saigon" in London. Isay Alvarez was immediately given the second-lead role of Gigi, but the male cast members, Robert Seña, Bobby Martino and Jonjon Briones, had to start in the chorus.

But the training they had received from their "Magsimula Ka" performances helped them quickly rise up the ranks, until all three of them were eventually tapped to play the male lead role of The Engineer, a phenomenal achievement for the three "chorus boys" who had what it took to all become lead stars on the international stage.

No wonder so many new talents want to be a part of the 2004 production of "Magsimula Ka," and are determined to give the hit musical everything they've got!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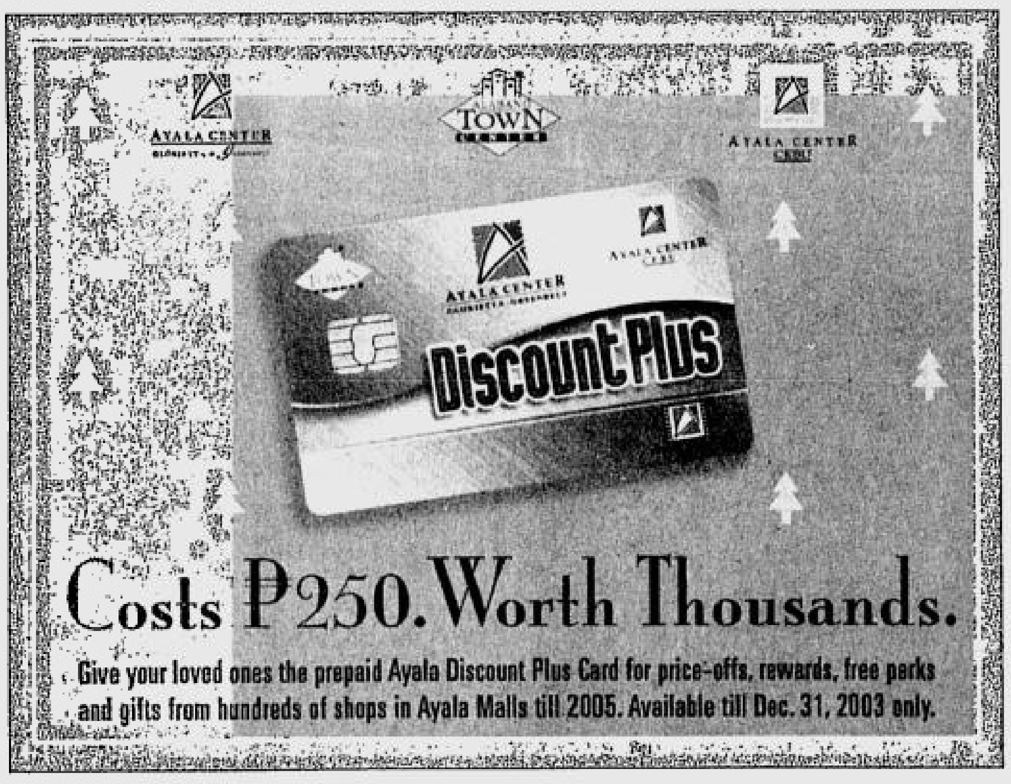
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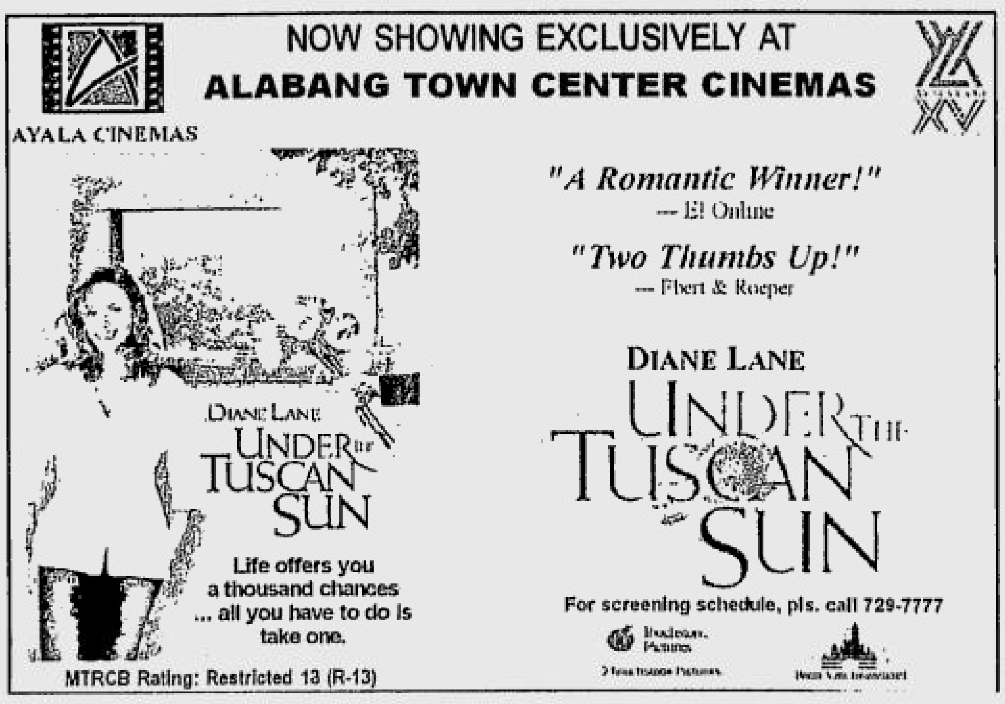
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Jed Maddela could be here to stay

By Noelani Torre

WE'D never heard of Jed Maddela, until we recently chanced upon his CD "Jed Maddela... I'll Be Around" (Universal Records).

Musical stardom

He's a fine singer, and with one album out, he appears to have his heart set on musical stardom.

"I'll Be Around" isn't Jed's first foray into music-making, though. He bagged the second prize in this year's Voice of Asia International Song Festival held in Kazakhstan. Vehnee Saturno penned Jed's contest pieces, "I'll Be Around" and "Labis Na Umiibig," both of which are included in the album.

Band

Despite his new status as a solo performer, Jed is still a member of the Prime Council band, and they have gigs at Aruba (Libis), the Manila Peninsula's Conservatory, and Strumms.

There are 10 cuts in "I'll Be Around," all love songs, of course (Pinoys seem to be perennially love-struck). But, no matter how worn the sentiment can be at times, Jed has an easy, youthful touch that elevates the songs above mere mushiness.

It's all in the voice, of course, and he has a particularly good one. Well modulated and light, but capable of depth and intensity when needed, he wields it with such seeming effortlessness that it's hard to remember that he's still relatively new at this.

But though he may be a newcomer, professionally speaking, Jed has a respectable musical background that no doubt nourished his burgeoning talent.

Hailing from a family of musicians and music-lovers back in Iloilo City, Jed, whose real surname is Tajanlangit, sang in choirs and participated in singing competitions before finally deciding to pursue a professional show biz singing career (and scrapping plans to be a flight attendant).

Decision

Though not altogether pleased with this decision, his folks eventually came around to the idea after his successful Kazakhstan stint and the release of this first album.

The album's carrier single is "Let Me Love You (From the Bottom of My Heart)," which we're sure most of you have already heard as it's been a radio and television staple lately. The song seems tailor-made for Jed's voice and style with its light, pop quality and pleasantly high notes.

Speaking of tailor-made songs, Ogie Alcasid composed one track in this album especially for Jed. "Sabihin Mo," though it isn't exactly the best Alcasid song out there, is nevertheless well done and sung, and will no doubt appeal to a wide audience.

Other songs in the album were penned by Jimmy Antiporda and Ito Rapadas who, along with Saturno and Alcasid, co-produced the album. All in all, it's a good introduction to a singer who, if his luck holds, will be in the music field for keeps.

MADDELA. His well-modulated voice is capable of depth and intensity.

BARRIOS. Didn't write songs for two years.

Bayang Barrios tops the Metropop

By Jocelyn Valle

BAYANG Barrios and Mike Villegas had high hopes for their collaboration, "Bagong Umaga," in Metropop 1996. Unfortunately, they failed to get the judges' nod. The musical pair, who tied the knot last June, got so discouraged that they didn't write songs for the next two years.

Overwhelmed

"That's why it took me sometime to come back onstage," recalls Bayang of the moment when Metropop 2003 hosts Ryan Cayabyab and Pops Fernandez called out her name as the grand-prize winner during the finals night presentation last month. "I was already overwhelmed, because Mike had won second place."

That night, she went home with P500,000 and a glass trophy sculpted by Ramon Orlina for her composition, "Malayo Man, Malapit Din," while Mike won P300,000 and a trophy for "Pretend That I Don't Love You."

Bayang recalls that she had no intentions of joining this year's Metropop. The melody of "Malapit Man, Malayo Din" had been lingering in her mind for a long time, but it was only a week before the deadline for submission of entries that she was able to pen the lyrics.

By then, Mike had already completed two tunes, both of which landed in the short list. "Pretend That I Don't Love You" was the screening committee's choice for the finals.

Simple song

"Mine is just a simple song," admits the 35-year-old singer-songwriter. "That's why I didn't expect to win. I've learned from past experience that we shouldn't expect too much, and just enjoy being in the finals. But I gave everything I had in performing my entry. I'm thankful to the judges, they're open to all types of music."

Indeed, this year's crop of Metropop entries reflected the dynamism of Filipino songwriters and performers. Bayang stood out in her T'boli tribe-inspired costume, made in Davao, and her body movements showed off her Manobo roots.

And Cooky Chua was her usual cool self as she interpreted the jazzy love song, "Pretend That I Don't Love You," for her former Color It Red bandmate, Mike, who'd also been part of the rock group Rizal Underground.

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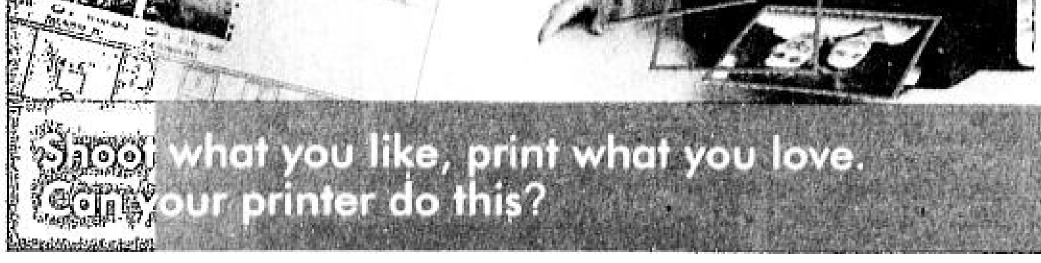

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TV survey assesses program content disturbing to children

By Nestor U. Torre

FOR a long time now, parents, and educators have been rapping some TV channels for irresponsible or exploitative program content, which they feel is particularly harmful to children. Thus far, however, these criticisms have been based on occasional viewing, so the observations are sometimes deemed subjective and imprecise, and are thus questioned in turn by the channels involved.

Comprehensive study

For the first time, however, we now have a comprehensive study of dubious and potentially harmful content on TV, so the discussion can be conducted on a more factual and comprehensive basis.

From Aug. 7 to 21 this year, Columbia International Food Products Inc. commissioned the Southeast Asian Foundation for Children's Television to conduct a study to "monitor and measure the content of sex, aggression and inanities on free Philippine television."

It was hoped that the results of the study would "provide parents and educators a useful gauge for selecting TV programs, channels and hours that are child friendly."

The foundation's Secretary General, Mag Cruz Hatol, observes, "The material resulting from the monitoring project forms part of our efforts to encourage televiewers to be more prudent in their use of the TV set, especially when children are watching.

"The study by no means intends to disparage the networks, for they are in the business of entertainment and information, not values formation.

Babysitter

"Thus, we feel that it is incumbent on the parents and elders of a household to ensure that the TV set is used neither as a babysitter nor toy for the child, because adults and children alike share TV air space."

So, it's clear that the study is not meant to be punitive, but to depict the TV stations' program content as it really is, so that parents can be guided, children can be protected, and channels may be persuaded to voluntarily correct the perceived flaws or excesses in their content or visualizations.

The landmark study entailed the consistent monitoring of all shows and network-produced ads from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. on all free TV channels, both UHF and VHF, during a two-week period. Each research day covered 15 hours of viewing, or a total of 2,520 hours of viewing for the entire period of the study.

Southeast Asian Foundation for Children's Television

SEAFCTV president Ed Roces (center) with Unicef's Dale Rutstein (left) and Columbia International Food Products' Elvira Go.

Researchers were assigned one shift each per day. Every graphic or verbal depiction or incidence of sex, violence or crass conduct was video-recorded and noted down on a logbook. The tapes were carefully labeled and accurately logged for quick reference.

The study covered ABS-CBN, ABC, GMA, RPN, ZOE, IBC, SBN, Studio 23 and NET. (NBN and RJTV were monitored for only two days, to get a feel of their programming content.)

Findings

The findings of the Columbia TV Study: Aggregate total time exposure of scenes deemed offensive to children, particularly if unsupervised by adults:

MTV Channel (with Myx): 9 hours, 53 minutes, 35 seconds. Breakdown: Where scenes were sexually suggestive, 2 hours and 5 minutes. Objectification of women (sexism), 1 hour and 10 minutes. Sexually explicit, 27 minutes and 13 seconds. Extremely violent, 35 minutes and 40 seconds.

Studio 23, 7 hours and 1 2 minutes. Where scenes portrayed extreme violence, 3 hours and 28 minutes. Showed sexual suggestiveness, 3 hours and 9 minutes. Showed verbal abuse, 1 hour and 3 minutes. Physical abuse, 1 hour and 7 minutes.

GMA, 4 hours, 59 minutes, 24 seconds. Where scenes portrayed extreme violence, 43 minutes and 27 seconds. Showed sexual suggestiveness, 39 minutes and 42 seconds. Verbal abuse, 23 minutes and 59 seconds. Physical abuse, 31 minutes and 14 seconds.

ABS-CBN, 4 hours, 58 minutes, 48 seconds. Where scenes portrayed extreme violence, 1 hour and 5 minutes. Showed sexual suggestiveness, 1 hour and 15 minutes. Verbal abuse, 42 minutes and 13 seconds. Physical abuse, 43 minutes and 33 seconds.

Extreme violence

RPN, one hour, 44 minutes. Where scenes portrayed extreme violence, 35 minutes and 42 seconds. Showed sexual suggestiveness, 20 minutes and 36 seconds. Verbal abuse, 8 minutes and 6 seconds. Physical abuse, 14 minutes and 38 seconds.

ABC, 1 hour, 43 minutes, 16 seconds, Extreme violence, 48 minutes and 8 seconds. Sexual suggestiveness, 9 minutes and 29 seconds. Physical abuse, 17 minutes and 9 seconds.

IBC, 49 minutes, 53 seconds. Extreme violence, 45 minutes and 31 seconds. Sexual suggestiveness, 4 minutes and 57 seconds. Verbal abuse 1 minute and 52 seconds. Physical abuse, 8 minutes and 33 seconds.

Verbal abuse

SBN, 36 minutes, 50 seconds. Extreme violence, 4 minutes and 37 seconds, Sexual suggestiveness, 22 minutes and 7 seconds. Verbal abuse, 14 minutes and 55 seconds. Physical abuse, 1 minute and 51 seconds.

NET 25, 22 minutes, 27 seconds. Extreme violence, 8 minutes and 18 seconds. Sexual suggestiveness, 9 minutes and 57 seconds. Verbal abuse, 34 minutes and 38 seconds. Physical abuse, 22 minutes and 7 seconds.

ZOE, 8 minutes, 7 seconds. Extreme violence, 44 seconds. Verbal abuse, 3 minutes and 58 seconds. Physical abuse, 6 minutes and 9 seconds.

(Partial: NBN, 1 minute and 37 seconds. Extremé violence, 41

TV/ C7

Dumaguete's 'Christmas house' spreads Yuletide cheer

By Behn Cervantes

A GROUP was invited to Dumaguete by Gov. George Arnaiz over the weekend to judge Sayawit, an annual contest that pits the different cities and municipalities of Negros Oriental in competition for the grand prize. There was also a *parol* contest.

Musical expertise

National Artist for Music Andrea Ofilada Veneracion led the group. Cora Generoso Iñigo was there to gauge the dancing and choreography component, while Dean Maurica Borromeo of the UP Conservatory of Music contributed her musical expertise. Stockholm Commercial Attache Hedfors, a former UP Concert Chorus member, was another judge. I pitched in for CCP Artistic Director Nanding Josef, who suddenly took ill.

After the energetic performances from 11 cities and municipalities, our attentive hosts, Bing Uy, Nena Cid, Carmen Cabrerra and Loly Raymundo, took us to Dumaguete's tourist attraction during the Yuletide season, where we were to meet contest coordinator Mairant Escaño Villegas.

The Dumaguete attraction is the Christmas house of Dr. Rico Absin, an anesthesiologist, who has decorated the exterior of his home with fabulous Christmas lights and décor every Yuletide season for the last 15 years.

Dumaguete City

DR. ABSIN'S house is lit up at midnight.

Midnight

The well-appointed home was shown to us in the afternoon. When we returned at about midnight and beheld it all lit up, it took our breath away. Gosh, Disneyland has been transplanted to staid Dumaguete!

Inside, each room was decorated extensively with *belens* and all kinds of colorful Christmas décor.

Every nook and cranny was crowded with Yuletide knickknacks. There was even a life-size singing and dancing Santa Claus by the house's entrance.

I asked Rico why he went through all this trouble, and he related that his late mother loved to decorate their home rather extensively during the festive season. Personally, he didn't care all that much for Christmas decor. However, a few months before Christmas 15 years ago, she was diagnosed with leukemia.

Theme

His beloved mother passed away soon after, so when Christmas came that mournful year, he didn't know what to do with her Christmas décor. Since they brought back painful memories, he decided to put them up in their big garden. The lighted décor attracted Dumaguete residents by the thousands, who stood to admire the Christmas house outside his gate. The next year, he added more décor. Finally, he introduced a theme.

Since so many people were interested in what he had inside, he generously opened his doors to them.

Since then, he has an "open house" from Dec. 16 to Jan. 2, with a grand show for starters. This year, no less than matinee idol Marvin Agustin and the Pamana Choir of the city of Dumaguete performed on "opening night."

Given the thousands of items within easy reach, has he lost any? "*Sa awa ng Diyos, wala pa.*" Rico even recalls when NPA guerrillas sent him a note stating that his practice was an "ostentatious display of wealth."

Residents

However, when some of them came to investigate, they realized that he was spreading Christmas cheer to thousands of Dumaguete residents, and they left, never to be heard from again.

Crystal is the appropriate motif for the display's 15th year. Asked what his electric bill was, considering the power needed for all of the decorations, Rico smiled, "Quite a lot."

Ironically, Rico is alone at the stroke of midnight. Inside this colorful and well-lit Christmas home, Rico awaits calls from his many friends.

Is he lonely? No, in fact he is elated that he's made many thousands experience the abundance, color and enriching spirit of Christmas!

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ROBEN	BOLD STAR
TANDEM-1	SUGAT
TANDEM-2	KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
TIMES	SPY / LEGEND OF CROCODILE
QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	ORIGINAL SIN
ACT-4	HANGGANG KAILAN KA PAPATAY
CORONET A	ALIPIN
CORONET B	A MAN APART
QUEZON-1	BERTUD NG PUTIK
REMAR	X-MEN 2
REMAR-2	BOLD STAR
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C	
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CINEMA-2	ALIPIN
CINEMA-3	WAG KANG KIKIBO
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	MR. SUAVE
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	LORD OF THE RINGS 1
CINEMA-6	CHAVIT
CINEMA-7	BABAE SA BREAKWATER
CINEMA-8	ASBOOBS
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	LOST ISLAND
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	LORDS OF THE RINGS 2
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CINEMA-14	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
CINEMA-15	F/F
LORES	
CINEMA-2	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-3	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
NE CINEMAGIC - CABANATUAN	
(LAS PINAS)	OUT OF TIME
CINEMA-1	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
CINEMA-2	FIGHTING TEMPTATIONS
CINEMA 4	COLD CREEK MANOR
UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARANAQUE)	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-1	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
CINEMA-2	MEN IN BLACK II
CINEMA-4	SELDA

Learning without suffering

LOTUS POND

R. Valencia and S. Bismark

THERE are three ways you can go about learning the truth about this world. The first is the most difficult and painful —through direct experience.

Drugs

For example, if a boy is taught that drugs will destroy his life, he may not immediately accept the truth and instead experiment with different drugs. After several years of suffering physical, mental and psychological damage, he may then conclude that drugs do lead to a miserable existence.

He could have opted to gain wisdom through another process—seeing and learning from the experiences of others. He could have observed drug addicts and seen the effect of drugs on their lives. This is a quicker and safer method than the first!

Some parents like to say, "Oh, let teenagers experiment and learn." Thus we find young people trying out sex, drugs, pornography and even suicide. They end up confused, battered and lifeless. The cost of learning can be quite high.

Sage

The third and easiest way to learn is via hearing from a bonafide authority or sage. A person thus gains wisdom without going through pain and failure.

A stubborn man insists on learning via direct experience, while an intelligent person learns from an authority.

The humble and sincere accept the fact that they don't know. They seek a qualified teacher and learn submissively from him. Humble and intelligent students learn quicker than a puffed up fool!

Email lotuspond108@hotmail.com

Christmas specials

From page C7

I later found out that the sauce is called Cabernet Sauvignon—Shallot au jus. It was slightly thick, sticky and was simply outstanding.

Authors

The authors of this great concoction are Chefs Mon, and his wife Monique Eugenio, and Chef Mel Resuma—all award winners in cooking competitions.

Mon and Monique also recommend the Green Peppercorn and Morel sauce. Order the whole roast—perfect as the main dish for any Christmas celebration. Call (0917)533-155, tel. nos. 893-8348, 893-8359.

Merry Christmas to you all. God bless!

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ALI MALL CINEPLEX 7

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'MYSTIC RIVER'

Eastwood comes up with another winner

By Rito P. Asilo

IN Clint Eastwood's "Mystic River," a boy's life is changed forever by a tragic childhood incident—he is abducted by pedophiles who pose as cops, while his friends look on helplessly.

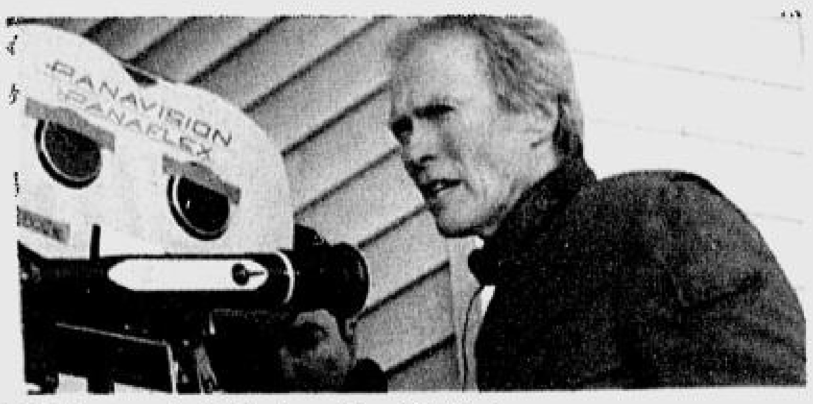
Emotionally distant

Thirty years later, childhood friends Jimmy (Sean Penn), Sean (Kevin Bacon), and Dave (Tim Robbins) reunite following the murder of Jimmy's oldest daughter, Katie. Sean, now a police detective with a troubled domestic life (his pregnant wife leaves him because he's emotionally distant and negligent), is called in to investigate the heinous crime, whose prime suspect is Dave, who saunters through adult life a damaged man.

Dave's wife, Celeste (Marcia Gay Harden in an Oscar-worthy performance), consumed by guilt and paranoia, tips off a grief-stricken Jimmy, now an ex-con who runs a corner store, after her husband comes home covered with blood.

Violent death

Dave claims to have fought off a mugger, whom he fears he might have killed, on his way home from a bar where he, incidentally, saw a happy Katie a few hours before her violent death.



DIRECTOR Eastwood tells his story without histrionics.

The distraught father swears vengeance on the man responsible for his daughter's death. Celeste's suspicion grows when nothing about the alleged mugger's death is reported in the papers.

We won't spoil the movie for you by revealing the details surrounding this plot point in the story. Suffice it to say that the revelation—a comeuppance that ironically results in tragedy—makes the film numbingly horrifying.

Watching these troubled characters inhabit their imperfect worlds as they try to deal with personal demons makes for an uncomfortable viewing experience. The movie questions our skewed perception of the moral world.

What sets this highly engaging drama apart is Eastwood's ability to tell his story (written by Brian Helgeland from a book by Dennis Lehane) devoid of the usual histrionics associated with dramas that employ emotional blackmail.

Aided by a haunting, brooding soundtrack composed by Eastwood himself, the film's emotionally-charged scenes smolder with uncommon restraint that makes the movie a more effective gut-puncher than many films in its genre.

The director coaxes informed, painfully honest performances from his actors. Despite flawed, unsympathetic protagonists, you empathize with these troubled souls because their characters and motivations are clearly drawn.

Aside from Harden, Robbins (as a man reduced by the circumstances of his unfortunate fate) and Bacon (as a world-weary cop who still hopes to save his marriage even after his wife leaves him) deliver indelible performances.

Sean Penn turns in a devastatingly truthful portrayal, certainly one that can stand alongside his gritty turns in "Dead Man Walking," "Sweet and Lowdown," "Hurlyburly" (which won him the Venice filmfest's Best Actor trophy in 1999) and "She's So Lovely," for which he won Cannes' Best Actor award in 1997.

We have yet to see the upcoming "21 Grams," directed by Alejandro Inarritu ("Amores Perros"), which won for Penn his second Venice trophy recently.

Superlative performance

While he has, without a doubt, delivered a superlative performance in "Mystic River," which may cop him his first Oscar, we feel that his turn in 2001's "I Am Sam" was better because of the greater "degree of difficulty" of that role. He convincingly played a mentally challenged father confronted with the possibility of losing custody of his daughter.

In Eastwood's 24th film feature as director, the 73-year-old auteur proves once again that the sharp mind behind 1992's "Unforgiven," "The Bridges of Madison County" and, our personal favorite, 1990's "White Hunter, Black Heart," hasn't lost its touch.

Christmas specials

WORD OF MOUTH

Sandy Daza

BY this weekend, most of us shall have attended many Christmas parties.

Drop the diet and just plan on making up for overeating after New Year's Eve. This is the worst time to hold back, since the best dishes are created this time of year.

Every home is known for a Christmas special. In my *lola's* home, the "signature" dishes were *bacalao, paella valenciana, relleno,* and lasagna made from *molo* wrappers.

Yuletide feasts

Other homes prefer events catered to spare themselves the headache of preparing Yuletide feasts. Christmas just gets better and better. Many items that could not be found before are already available in Manila. Rico's Cebu *lechon,* for example, can be ordered still crunchy and freshly roasted direct from the South—call (0917)407-2033, (032) 344-0119. I also hear the *lechon* of Cagayan De Oro is super.

Many baking talents also come out and do great business during this time of year.

One special dish I would like to share: I recently tried this inch-and-a-half thick perfectly roasted Black Angus Prime Rib. On the side were some greens, potatoes and a bowl of dark sauce. The excellent beef was cooked medium, and the sauce was out of this world.

CHRISTMAS/ C6

TV survey assesses . . .

From page C6

seconds, Verbal abuse, 15 seconds.

RJTV, 4 hours, 34 minutes, 41 seconds—scenes were mostly sexually suggestive or explicit.)

Included in the monitoring were all network ads, infomercials, government announcements and commercial ad placements.

More factual basis

Now that the study's findings are in, efforts to improve the TV landscape, and to make program content more child-friendly can proceed on a more factual and specific basis, so that millions of Filipino children can be better served by television.

It is hoped that TV people won't resent the results of the study, but will instead be motivated to reassess their work and make improvements where they are due.

For inquiries about the Columbia TV Study (The Philippine Television Landscape as Monitored by the Southeast Asian Foundation for Children's Television), contact: Mag Cruz Hatol, Secretary General, SEAFCTV, 87 Scout Fuentebella st., Morato ave., Quezon City—tel. nos. 374-7066, 411-9142, fax 412-0529. Email: maghatol@pacific.net.ph.

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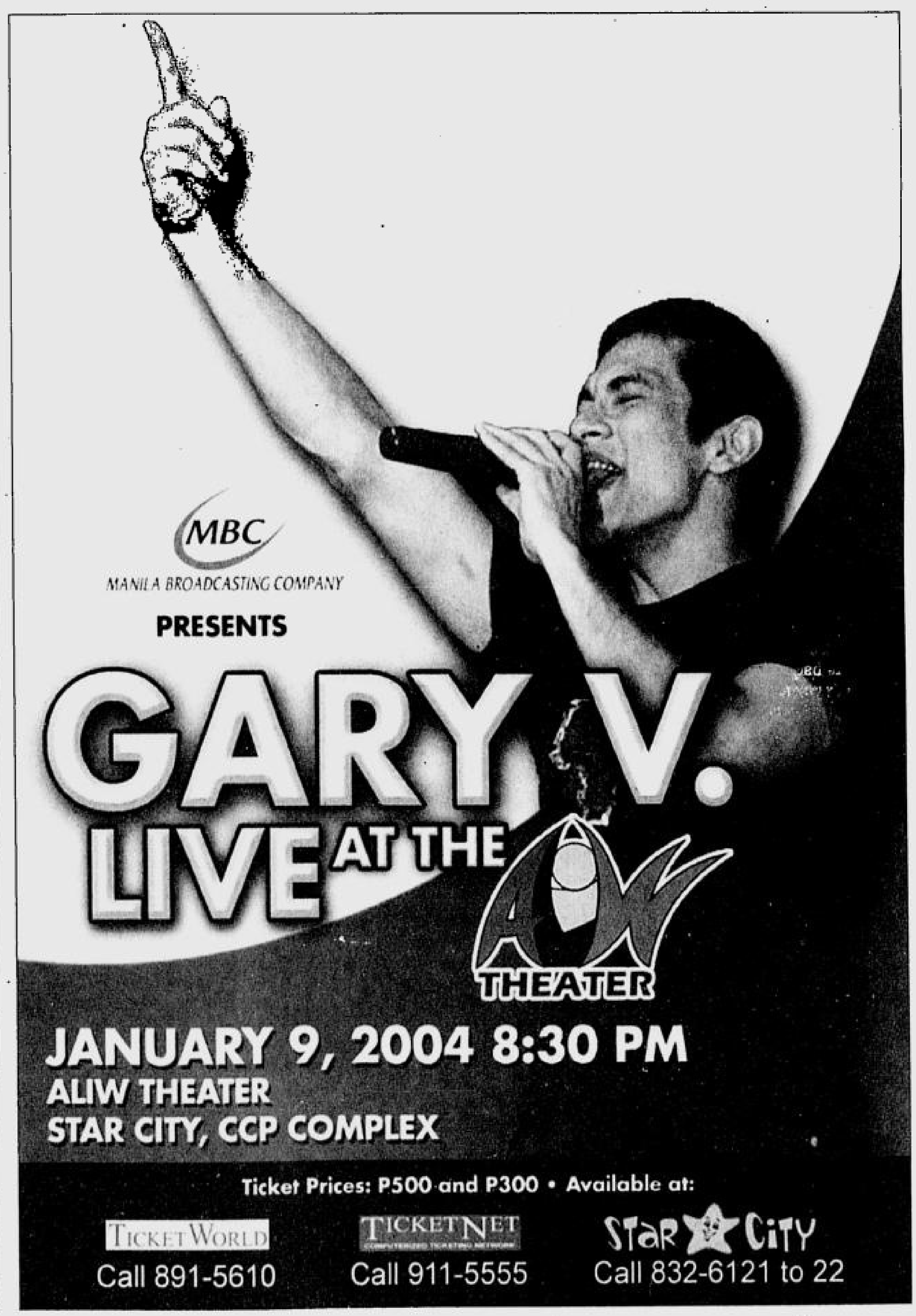
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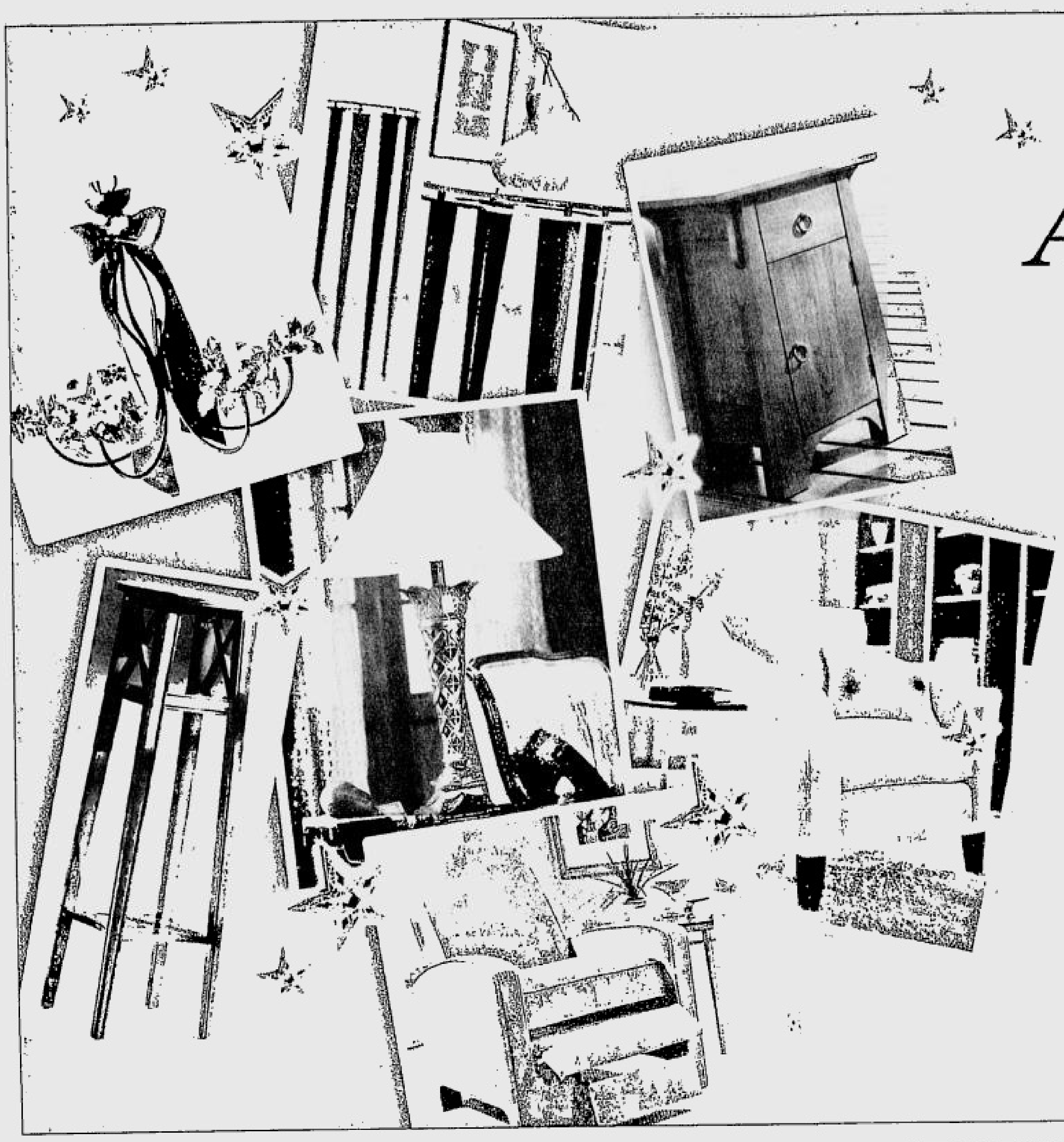

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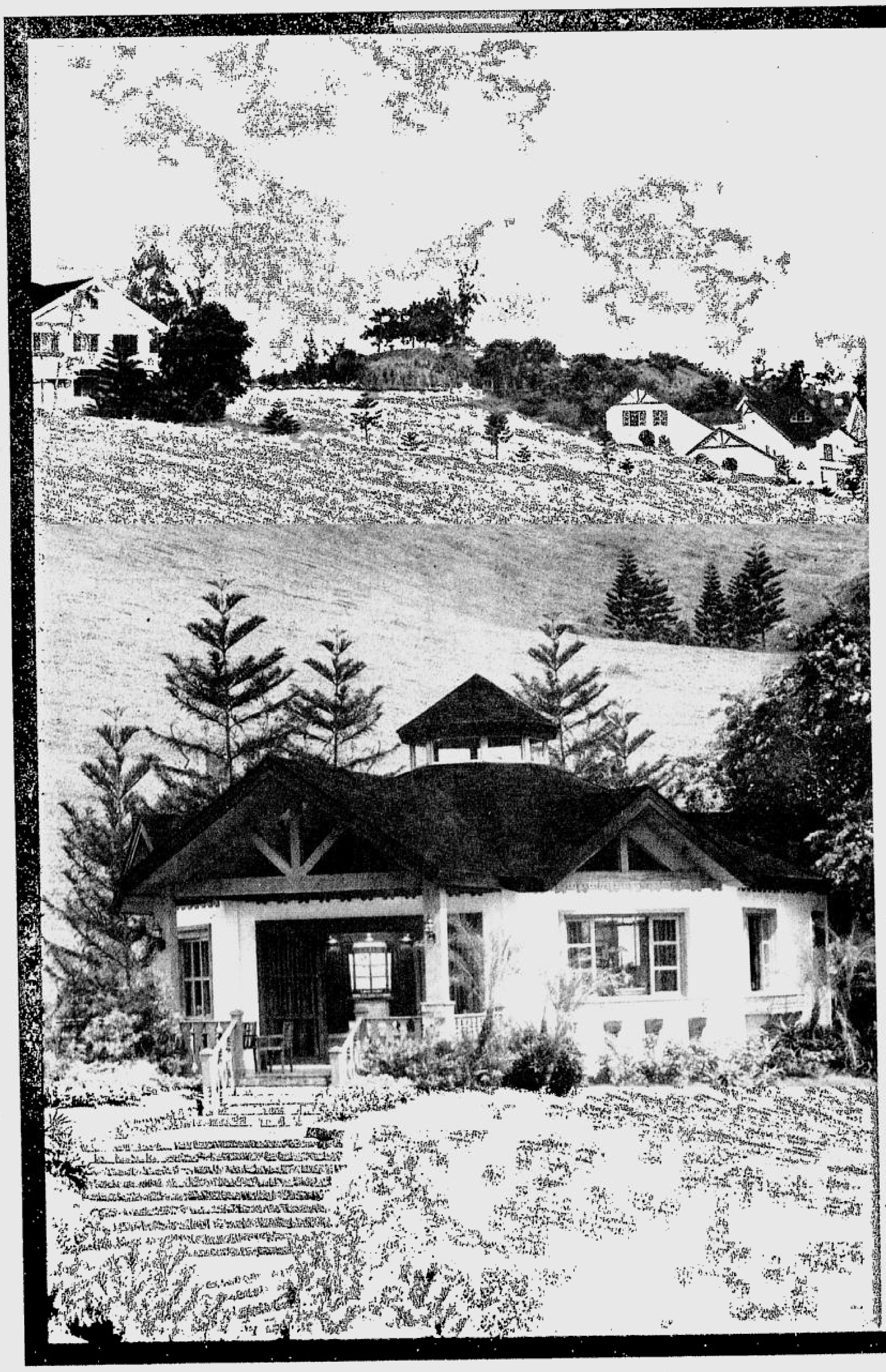

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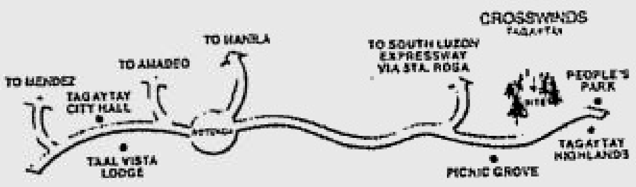
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SATURDAY *Special*

NY film critics cite 'Lord of the Rings' as 2003's top film

NEW YORK—Normally a champion of arty, independent fare, the New York Film Critics Circle on Monday chose "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" as the top film of 2003.

IAN McKellen as Gandalf battles evil in this scene from "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King." AP

Sweeping spectacle

The three-hour-plus epic, which is the final part of the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy based on J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novels, is a sweeping spectacle of computer-generated imagery—and it couldn't be more different from the rest of the films the group honored.

The critics group, composed of writers for the city's major newspapers and magazines, usually recognizes films that stand as an intellectual counterpoint to the Oscar voters' more traditional choices.

In 2002, the critics picked the '50s melodrama, "Far From Heaven," as the best film; the Oscar went to the musical, "Chicago." In 2001, David Lynch's "Mulholland Drive" was the group's choice for best film; the Academy Award went to Ron Howard's "A Beautiful Mind."

This year, the New York critics chose "Lord of the Rings" because it's "a masterful piece of filmmaking," chairman Andrew Johnston said.

Pure cinema

"It's just beautifully made, it's pure cinema, it does everything," said Johnston, a critic for Radar magazine. "It's got amazing, epic scope to the drama, to the battle scenes, a lot of strong emotional stuff, really complex, well-rendered characters and effective comic relief where it needs it."

Tom O'Neil, author of "Movie Awards" and host of the awards handicapping website GoldDerby.com, said he was "totally stunned" by the group's choice for best picture.

"This pushes 'Lord of the Rings' to the Oscar forefront," he said. "The critics usually go for little indie movies. When they go for the blockbusters—'The Silence of the Lambs' or 'Schindler's List'—they usually go all the way."

Johnston said choosing "Lord of the Rings" isn't a radical departure for the New York Film Critics Circle. Other films in the running for the top honor were "Mystic River," "American Splendor" and "Lost in Translation."

"All the films we go for tend to be ambitious films that take chances," he said. "Making something on this scale—all three movies at the same time, New Line betting its very existence on the success of the project and having it turn out far better than anyone could have imagined—is very much in the same line as many of our past winners."

The critics chose Sofia Coppola as best director for the dreamlike "Lost in Translation," about an aging actor and a young wife who become friends while suffering from jet lag at a Tokyo hotel. The film's star, Bill Murray, was named best actor.

Best actress

Hope Davis was the group's choice for best actress for her work in two films: "American Splendor," in which she plays the bookish wife of comic book writer Harvey Pekar, and "The Secret Lives of Dentists," in which she plays a dentist and part-time opera singer who's having an affair.

"American Splendor" also was honored as best first film for the directing-writing team of Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini. Part feature and part documentary, with animated elements thrown in, the film stars Paul Giamatti as the disgruntled Pekar.

"The Secret Lives of Dentists" also was honored for its script by Craig Lucas.

In the supporting acting categories, Shohreh Ashdaghloo won for playing an Iranian immigrant in "House of Sand and Fog," and Eugene Levy won for his role as a washed-up folk singer in "A Mighty Wind."

Foreign-language film honors went to the graphically violent "City of God," about drug gang wars in Rio de Janeiro's slums.

"Capturing the Friedmans," a documentary about allegations of child molestation in a Long Island family, won for best nonfiction film.

The twisted French film, "The Triplets of Belleville" was the group's choice for best animated feature.

Cinematographer Harris Savides was recognized for his work on two films by director Gus Van Sant: "Elephant," about a high school shooting spree, and "Gerry," in which Matt Damon and Casey Affleck wander through the desert and barely speak. *AP*

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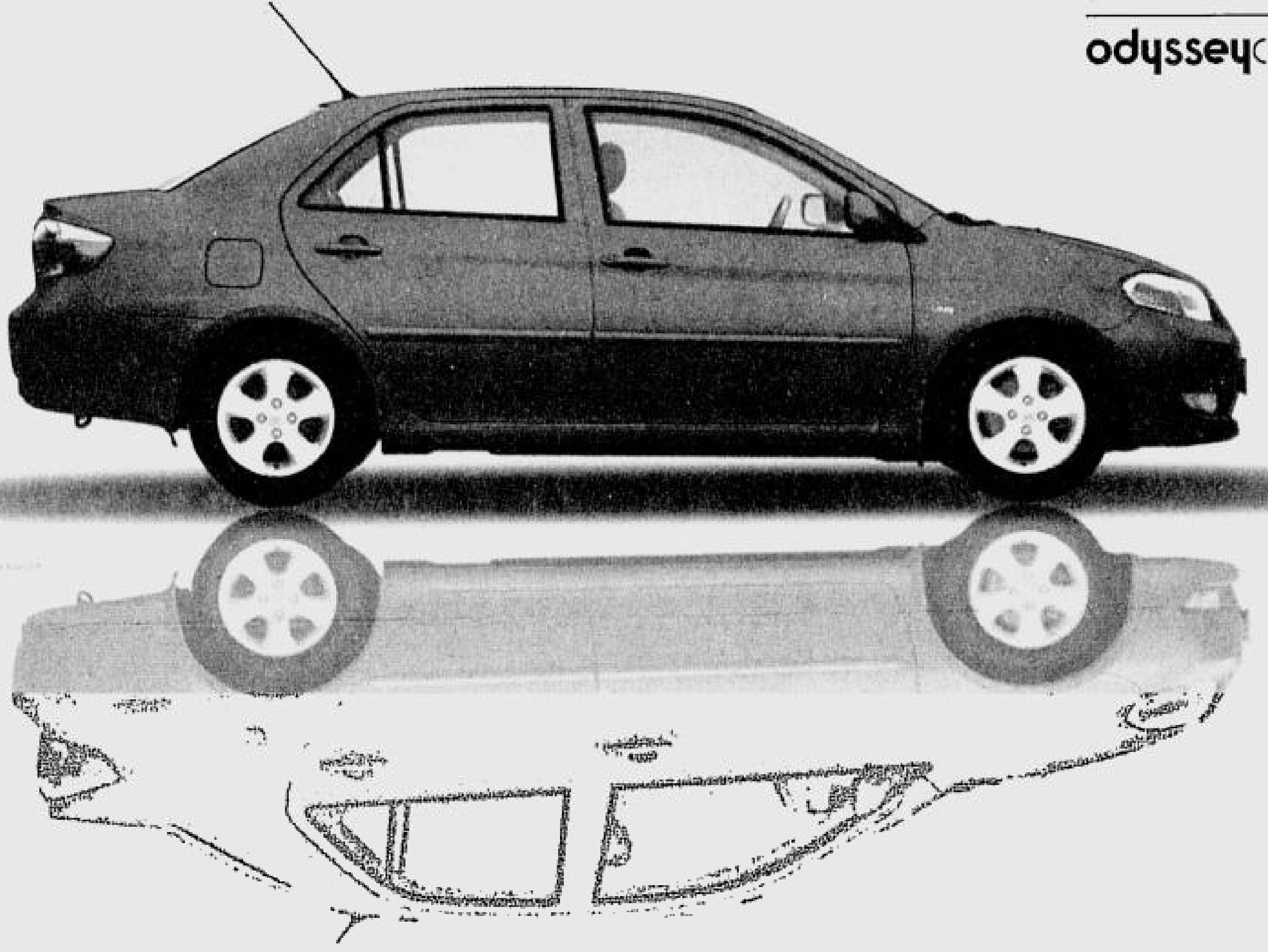

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Jude Law wears his heart on his sleeve

SHOW BIZ Q & A

Rito P. Asilo

FROM Thina Quibin of Bagbag, Novaliches: "Does Jude Law direct movies? What are his upcoming projects? I love his films because he chooses to play unconventional roles."

Jude Law doesn't direct films, although his body of work includes a directorial stint on an 84-minute TV movie, "Tube Tales" (1999), a collection of nine short stories based on true-to-life experiences of London's Underground commuters.

Heartthrob

Along with Ewan McGregor, Bob Hoskins and six other segment directors, the classically handsome 5'11" heartthrob (who turns 31 on Dec. 30) directed the segment, "A Bird in the Head."

Law chooses his roles well. In an interview, he revealed that he didn't go for roles that acting hopefuls usually yearn for. He said, "I've always thought that Prince Charming in 'Cinderella' is a most boring role. I'd rather be the Wicked Witch!" He will next appear in some of the most exciting projects in tinseltown with some of the biggest names in show business:

LAW. Doesn't go for roles that acting hopefuls usually yearn for.

Other than the current "Cold Mountain" (chosen this week by the New York Film Critics as one of the 10 best films of 2003), with Nicole Kidman and Renee Zellweger. Jude will be seen in "I Love Huckabee's," with Naomi Watts, Dustin Hoffman, Mark Wahlberg and Isabelle Huppert. And he will portray Errol Flynn in Martin Scorsese's highly anticipated Howard Hughes project, "The Aviator," with Leonardo DiCaprio in the title role.

In "The World of Tomorrow," he stars alongside Angelina Jolie and Gwyneth Paltrow. He plays the title role in "Lemony Cricket's A Series of Unfortunate Events" with—hold your breath!—Meryl Streep and Jim Carrey.

He will headline "Tulip Fever" opposite current Hollywood "It" girl, Keira Knightley ("Bend It Like Beckham," "The Pirates of the Caribbean") and Jim Broadbent. He also topbills Mike Nichols' adaptation of Patrick Marber's play, "Closer," with Julia Roberts, Clive Owen and Natalie Portman, and he will play the title role in a remake of the Michael Caine classic, "Alfie," with current live-in love, Sienna Miller.

Whew! For someone who's picky about the movies he appears in, the Oscar-nominated actor sure has a lot of great options!

Law has, indeed, come a long way. For his Oscar-nominated turn in Anthony Minghella's "The Talented Mr. Ripley," he was payed a "measly" $750,000. But for "Cold Mountain," he received a cool $10 million!

Jude possesses a unique movie-star sophistication and mystique characteristic of Hollywood's glamorous luminaries in the '40s and '50s. He hates talking about his private life, but being the sensitive actor that he is, he wears his heart on his sleeve.

After ending his tumultuous six-year union last October with actress Sadie Frost ("Bram Stoker's Dracula"), with whom he has three kids, he intimated in an interview that filming "Cold Mountain" in Romania was a welcome reprieve from his marital woes.

He said, "It was a very hard, difficult shoot, but it was a chance to escape from obvious pressures. It was a wonderful opportunity to concentrate on work, and lose ourselves in the film. The movie came at a time when all of us were open to appreciate that kind of existence and could leave behind the traps we think we can't escape from."

Fascinating story behind Christmas carol revealed

By Behn Cervantes

"ON the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me a partridge in a pear tree..." goes the first line of one of my favorite Christmas carols. I figure that this Yuletide ditty was composed especially for children's amusement.

Lyrics

However, I never gave much heed to the history in those peculiar lyrics. But, thanks to the Internet, here is the story that explains those lyrics, which we thought were a mere play on words. There *is* a play on words, but the reasons for them are political, religious and colorfully historical! Here then is the history of that lilting roundelay, "The 12 Days of Christmas":

"From 1558 to 1829, Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. (Remember that Henry VIII had divorced his first wife Catherine for the younger and more beautiful Anne Boleyn. When the Vatican refused to recognize his divorce and marriage, he cut his Vatican ties and set up the Church of England.)

Someone during that era wrote this carol as a musical "catechism" for young Catholics.

Hidden meaning

It has different levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known to members of their Church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality that the children could remember.

'The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ. (I guess True Love is God, since the line goes: On the first day of Christmas my True Love gave to me...)

Two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments. Three French hens stood for faith, hope and love. The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The five golden rings recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.

THE BIRTH of Jesus Christ carries the important message of God's love for humanity.

The six geese stood for the six days of creation. Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: Prophecy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Contribution, Leadership and Mercy.

Beatitudes

The eight maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes. Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control. The 10 lords a-leaping were the Ten Commandments. The 11 pipers piping stood for the 11 faithful disciples. The 12 drummers drumming symbolized the 12 points of belief in the Apostles' Creed."

With this history, we can now better enjoy the lyrics of this well-loved carol and find greater meaning in lyrics that we may have thought were nothing more than a play on words and ideas.

Yes, let's all remember: our True Love did gift us with Love Incarnate—and the true meaning of Christmas. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Apprenticeship for new directors

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

STARTING Jan. 20, 2004, we are staging three one-act plays written by new playwrights at the Santa Ana Arts Center in Manila. This is our small way of helping promising playwrights develop their talent. There's nothing like seeing your script rehearsed and staged to learn the complex do's and don't's of playwriting.

Playwrights are important theater artists, but they're often overlooked because the usual focus is on the performers and director. Our play production project hopes to correct that focus to spotlight the importance of the script above all else.

To date, we have received inquiries not just from playwrights, but also from actors who want to be in the three one-act plays, and from budding directors. The directing hopefuls point out that they too have a hard time learning the ropes properly and getting started.

So, we're expanding the scope of our little "developmental" project to include prospective directors as well. Each one-act play will have three apprentice directors who will learn from seeing the scripts rehearsed. reworked, and finally staged from Jan. 20 onwards.

If you want to learn directing and are prepared to work hard (no hobbyists, please), you can apprentice with our play production project. Call Andy at 713-9323 or 0919 206-5424.

FEGI. Performs with Bituin Escalante and Jed Maddela at Discovery Suites' Serendipity Lounge.

Yuletide concert

The prizewinning Loboc Children's Choir form Bohol will be featured in a Yuletide concert at 3 and 7 p.m. on Dec. 20, and 4 and 7 p.m., on Dec. 21 at Festival Supermall in Alabang.

On Dec. 22 and 23 at 2 and 5 p.m., the mall will also present the musical play, "The Grinchmas," directed by Chari Arespacochaga, with Julien Mendoza as the Christmas Grinch, who tries to steal Christmas at Who-Ville, Santa-Land, and his last stop, Festival Supermall. Call 850-3514.

New Year's Eve countdown

Bituin Escalante, Anna Fegi and Jed Maddela will perform at the New Year's Eve show of Discovery Suite's Serendipity Lounge. The New Year's Eve Countdown starts at 8 p.m. on Dec. 31.

Discovery Suites and 105.1 Crossover will also present "Just Had to Be New Year's Eve," a Crossover Lounge Special. Call 635-2222.

Movies on TV

TOM Hanks plays the title role in "Forrest Gump," which will be shown on HBO at 3 p.m. today.

On HBO, Dec. 20 at 7:30 a.m., "Black Beauty." 3 p.m., "Forrest Gump." 10:30 p.m., "Black Hawk Down." Dec. 21 at 8 a.m., "With Honors." 9:45 a.m., "Almost Famous." 10:30 p.m., "The Fellowship of the Ring." Dec. 22 at 9 p.m., "The Score."

Dec. 23 at 11 a.m., "Riding in Cars with Boys." 6:45 p.m., "Enemy at the Gates." 9 p.m., "America's Sweethearts." Dec. 24 at 9 p.m., "Shrek." 1:30 a.m., "Children of a Lesser God." Dec. 25 at 3 p.m., "The Man who Saved Christmas." 9 p.m., "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone." Dec. 26 at 7:30 p.m., "Big Fat Liar."

On Cinemax, Dec. 20 at 10:30 p.m., "Zoolander." Dec. 21 at 9 p.m., "Life as A House." Dec. 22 at 9 p.m., "Strange Frequency." Dec. 23 at 11:30 p.m., "Hamburger Hill." Dec. 24 at 11:30 a.m., "Crossing Delancey."

Dec. 25 at 4 p.m., "The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas." Dec. 26 at 7 p.m., "Witness. 9 p.m., "Lone Hero." 3:30 a.m., "Battle of the Bulge."

YOUR WEEKLY TV GUIDE FROM DEC 20 - DEC 26

CH									
	6:00 Star in A Million 6:30 Magandang Gabi, Bayan 8:30 Home Along da Airport 9:00 Victim 9:30 Buttercup 10:30 Kontrobersyal 11:30 "F" 12:00 Sports Unlimited	7:00 Yan Ang Pinoy 8:00 The Working President 9:00 To be Announced	7:00 Sailormoon Sailor Stars 7:30 Mirror, Mirror 8:00 Wow Mali! 9:00 Viva Box Office 11:00 Go For Gold	6:00 Search for a Star 7:00 Imbestigador 8:00 Idol Ko Si Kap 9:30 Kakabakaba Adventures 10:30 Celebrity Turns 11:30 Flash Report 12:00 Master Showman	5:00 Isumbong Mo Kay Tulfo 7:00 7 Days 8:00 John Doe 9:00 Saturday Night Playhouse 11:00 PGMA	5:00 National Basketball League 8:00 Japan Video Topics 9:00 Carols from Many Land 10:00 Tinapay ng Buhay 11:00 Iyo ang Katarungan	6:00 Baywatch 7:00 Game Plan 7:30 The Amazing Race 8:30 Boston Public 9:30 Studio 23 Presents 11:30 Reel Deel	6:00 Agila Report 6:30 Screen Savers 7:30 Euromaxx 8:00 Car Guys 8:30 DWTV Journal 9:00 Ang Tamang Daan 10:00 Pasugo	7:00 Xclusive Cinema Special 9:00 Oras Ng Katotohanan 9:30 Armor of God 10:00 Oh Tokyo 11:00 Pinoy Wrestling
	5:30 Sharon 7:00 Wansapanataym 8:30 Tanging Ina 9:30 Sunday Family Cinema 11:30 Dong Puno Tonight 12:00 The Weekend News	6:00 PBA First Filipino cup 9:00 The Working President 10:00 Concert of Various Artist	6:00 Zorro 6:30 Guylerd 7:00 Ispup atpb 8:00 Sing-Galing 9:00 Viva Cine Idols 11:00 Speed	5:30 Partners Mel & Jay 7:00 K! 8:30 Daddy Di Do Du 9:30 Sunday Night Box Office 11:20 Flash Report 11:30 Che-Che Lazaro Presents	6:00 Smack Down Wrestling 7:00 Ripley's Believe It or Not 8:00 May Puso ang Batas 9:00 Sunday's Big Event 11:00 A Second Look	7:00 2003 Worldpool Master 9:00 Sinemaks 11:00 Driven Show 11:30 El Shaddai	6:00 Jimmy Neutron 6:30 Futurama 7:00 Exposed 8:00 Yes Dear 8:30 Spin City 9:00 Will & Grace 9:30 The Bachelor 10:30 Digital Tour	6:00 Captured 6:30 Fresh Gear 7:00 Convergence 7:30 Euromaxx 8:00 New Yankee Workshop 8:30 DWTV Journal 9:00 Ang Tamang Daan 10:00 Ang Iglesia ni Cristo	7:00 Sunday Mini-Series 8:00 Oh Tokyo 9:00 Sunday Night movies
	6:00 TV Patrol 6:30 Next Level Na, Game K N B? 7:30 Basta't Kasama Kita 8:00 Sana'y Wala Nang Wakas 8:30 It Might Be You 9:00 OK Fine! Whatever 11:00 Insider 11:30 The Correspondents	6:00 Concert at the Park 7:00 Strangebrew 7:30 In the Raw 8:00 TeleDyaryo 10:00 Family Rosary Crusade 11:00 Auto Focus	6:00 F 6:30 Balitang-Balita 7:00 Problema Nyo, Sagot Ko 7:30 Kool on Kam 8:30 That 70s Show 9:00 On Air 9:30 Misadventures of Maverick and Ariel 10:00 The Big News 10:30 Mad TV	6:15 Frontpage 7:00 Extra Challenge 7:30 Twin Hearts 8:00 Endless Love II 8:30 Starstruck 9:00 Narito Ang Puso Ko 9:30 Lagot Ka, Isusumbong Kita 11:00 Saksi 11:30 I-Witness	5:00 Invader Zim 6:30 Entertainment Tonight 7:00 Just for Laffs 8:00 Jag 9:00 The Agency 10:00 Newswatch Now 10:30 Sex & the City 11:00 OPTV	7:00 NBA 9:30 In This Corner 10:30 IBC News Tonite 11:00 Linawin Natin	6:00 Beast Machines 6:30 Godzilla 7:00 Batman 7:30 Samurai X 8:00 Birds of Prey 9:00 Charmed 10:00 News Central 10:30 Oprah 11:30 Travel Time	6:00 Net 25 Report 6:30 World Report Filipino Edition 7:00 Openline 7:30 Euromaxx 8:00 Convergence 8:30 DWTV Journal 9:00 Ang Tamang Daan 10:00 Pasugo	6:30 Q Showcase 7:30 Oras ng Katotohanan 8:00 Q Showcase 9:00 Ang Dating Daan
	6:00 TV Patrol 6:30 Next Level Na, Game K N B? 7:30 Basta't Kasama Kita 8:00 Sana'y Wala Nang Wakas 8:30 It Might Be You 9:00 Bida Si Mister, Bida Si Misis 11:00 Insider 11:30 Pipo!	6:00 Paco Park Presents 7:00 Strangebrew 7:30 In the Raw 8:00 TeleDyaryo 10:00 The Working President 11:00 Family Rosary Crusade	6:00 2 Years Vacation w/ Dinosaurs 6:30 Balitang-Balita 7:00 Problema Nyo, Sagot Ko 7:30 Kool on Kam 8:30 Campus TV 9:00 E.R. 10:00 The Big News 10:30 Wedding Works 11:00 Bugs	6:15 Frontpage 7:00 Extra Challenge 7:30 Twin Hearts 8:00 Endless Love II 8:30 Starstruck 9:00 Narito Ang Puso Ko 9:30 All Together Now 11:00 Saksi 11:30 I-Witness	6:00 Invader Zim 6:30 Entertainment Tonight 7:00 Ed 8:00 Ally McBeal 9:00 Single Girls 10:00 Newswatch Now 10:30 Sports in Focus 11:00 RTV, Our Rhythm, Our Reality	7:00 2003 Worldpool Master 9:00 Entrepinoy 10:00 Travel 10:30 IBC News Tonite 11:00 Up Close and Personal 11:30 Action Express	6:00 Beast Machines 6:30 Godzilla 7:00 Batman 7:30 Samurai X 8:00 Dawson's Creek 9:00 Smallville 10:00 News Central 10:30 Oprah 11:30 Twilight Zone	6:00 Net 25 Report 6:30 World Report Filipino Edition 7:00 Openline 7:30 Euromaxx 8:00 Screen Savers Edit A 8:30 DWTV Journal 9:00 Ang Tamang Daan 10:00 Pasugo	6:30 Q Showcase 7:30 Oras ng Katotohanan 8:00 Ang Dating Daan
	6:00 TV Patrol 6:30 Next Level Na, Game K N B? 7:30 Basta't Kasama Kita 8:00 Sana'y Wala Nang Wakas 8:30 It Might Be You 9:00 Whattamen 10:00 Klasmeyts 11:00 Insider 11:30 Special Assignment	5:00 PBA First Filipino cup 10:00 MMDA on The Road 11:00 Magbuhay-Professional 11:30 Unlimited Diving	6:00 Pygmalio 6:30 Balitang-Balita 7:00 Problema Nyo, Sagot Ko 7:30 Kool on Kam 8:30 Friends 9:00 Single 10:00 The Big News 10:30 Task Force Siyasat	6:15 Frontpage 7:00 Extra Challenge 7:30 Twin Hearts 8:00 Endless Love II 8:30 Starstruck 9:00 Narito Ang Puso Ko 9:30 Nuts Entertainment 11:00 Saksi 11:30 Jessica Soho Reports	6:00 Invader Zim 6:30 Entertainment Tonight 7:00 Malcolm in the Middle 7:30 Still Standing 8:00 Roswell 9:00 Everwood 10:00 Newswatch Now 10:30 Girls Behaving Badly 11:00 Cerge for Truth	10:00 Breaking BYK 101 10:30 IBC News Tonite 11:00 Breaking Barriers	6:00 Beast Machines 6:30 Godzilla 7:00 Batman 7:30 Samurai X 8:00 CSI 9:00 Alias 10:00 News Central 10:30 Oprah 11:30 Twilight Zone	6:00 Net 25 Report 6:30 World Report Filipino Edition 7:00 Openline 7:30 Euromaxx 8:00 Fresh Gear 8:30 DWTV Journal 9:00 Ang Tamang Daan 10:00 The Message	6:30 Q Showcase 7:30 Oras ng Katotohanan 8:00 Q Showcase 9:00 Ang Dating Daan 10:30 Q Showcase
	6:00 TV Patrol 6:30 Next Level Na, Game K N B? 7:30 Basta't Kasama Kita 8:00 Sana'y Wala Nang Wakas 8:30 It Might Be You 9:00 Maalaala Mo Kaya 11:00 Insider 11:30 Dong Puno Live	6:00 The Working President 7:00 Ugnayan Pambansa 8:00 TeleDyaryo 10:00 Paco Park Presents 11:00 Family Rosary Crusade	6:00 Dragon League 6:30 Balitang-Balita 7:00 Problema Nyo, Sagot Ko 7:30 Kool on Kam 8:30 Guinness World Records 9:30 Working 10:00 The Big News 10:30 By Request	6:15 Frontpage 7:00 Extra Challenge 7:30 Twin Hearts 8:00 Endless Love II 8:30 Starstruck 9:00 Narito Ang Puso Ko 9:30 Magpakailanman 11:00 Saksi 11:30 Debate	6:00 Invader Zim 6:30 Entertainment Tonight 7:00 Baby Bob 7:30 Sabrina 8:00 Felicity 9:00 Crossing Jordan 10:00 Newswatch Now 10:30 Hidden Hills 11:00 Police Hour	6:00 Game Channel 7:00 NBA 9:30 CelebrityDatCom 10:30 IBC News Tonite 11:00 Opinyon at Desisyon	6:00 Beast Machines 6:30 Godzilla 7:00 Batman 7:30 Samurai X 8:00 Barkada Nights 10:00 News Central 10:30 Oprah 11:30 Twilight Zone	6:00 Net 25 Report 6:30 World Report Filipino Edition 7:00 Openline 7:30 Euromaxx 8:00 Screen Savers Edit B 8:30 DWTV Journal 9:00 Ang Tamang Daan 10:00 Pasugo	6:30 Q Showcase 7:30 Oras ng Katotohanan 8:00 Q Showcase 9:00 Ang Dating Daan 10:30 Q Showcase
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Shirley MacLaine discovers a higher kind of love in Brazil

By Ronald G. Mangubat

FOR centuries, illustrious people like St. Francis of Assisi, Charlemagne, Dante and Chaucer have gone on the pilgrimage called the Santiago de Compostela Camino across Northern Spain. It's a difficult and brutal 800-kilometer trek that starts from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port in France and ends in a cathedral in Camino, where the remains of St. James are said to be interred.

MACLAINE. Spiritual overachiever.

Long trek

Ancient belief has it that this long trek lies directly under the Milky Way and follows lines that reflect the energy from the star systems above it. More than a physical challenge, the pilgrimage is an intense spiritual journey.

Before the New Millennium, actress, writfer and Hollywood's "celestial and cosmic angel," Shirley Maclaine, was in Brazil for a one-woman show when she received an anonymous letter urging her to go on a pilgrimage to Camino. She ignored the message and went on performing and making films.

Three years later, she was back again in Brazil and got the same unsigned letter. After consulting with spiritual leaders, she decided to do the pilgrimage alone, on foot, with nothing but a backpack of personal belongings, some cash and a credit card.

Highways

Walking for 30 days at a rate of 20 miles per day, MacLaine, a woman in her 60s, bravely crossed highways, fields, mountains, streams and valleys, cites and towns, and slept in quaint motels (called refugios) while evading the European press and paparazzi.

In her ninth book, "The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit" (Pocket Books, 2000, 307 pp.), MacLaine chronicles her 30-day journey and delivers a breathtaking account of her adventure and quest for spiritual understanding.

With her self-deprecating humor, she writes about her doubts on doing the pilgrimage, which, she says was against her family's will. "I think I was walking the Camino to feel human again," she confesses.

Described by critics as a spiritual overachiever, the Oscar, three-time Emmy and 10-time Golden Globe award-winning actress has been traveling all over the world for more than 30 years, searching for answers to life's deep questions, while at the same time pursuing her passion as a writer and performing artist.

She does not subscribe to any religion and hates to be called a New Age Guru. She simply describes herself as a person who is open to the reality of other dimensional truths and believes that all of life is a lesson in self-knowledge.

Teachings

In this book, however, she reconciles her unconventional spiritual beliefs with the teachings of Christianity.

A travel book *cum* spiritual journal, "The Camino" is an impressive and remarkable hodgepodge of interesting information on history, culture, show business, religion and spirituality, which Maclaine dispenses with her intelligent observations and honest reflections.

Halfway through the book, however, the author warns her readers that the succeeding chapters might turn off those who are not open to unconventional beliefs. And then she writes about her dream visions of going back in time and meeting a certain John Scot, who she says, was a cleric and teacher in Charlemagne's court.

He engages MacLaine in conversations about the secrets of ancient civilizations, human genesis, gender and sexuality, and even takes her to Lemuria and Atlantis! I

It's a little bit odd reading this part and MacLaine confesses that she has no evidence to prove that her dream visions were true. But she argues, "The absence of evidence does not mean the evidence of absence."

Ruminations

Even those who are not into reincarnation, extraterrestrials, UFOs and all that stuff will find the book interesting, if only for MacLaine's philosophical ruminations about her memories, imagination and emotions.

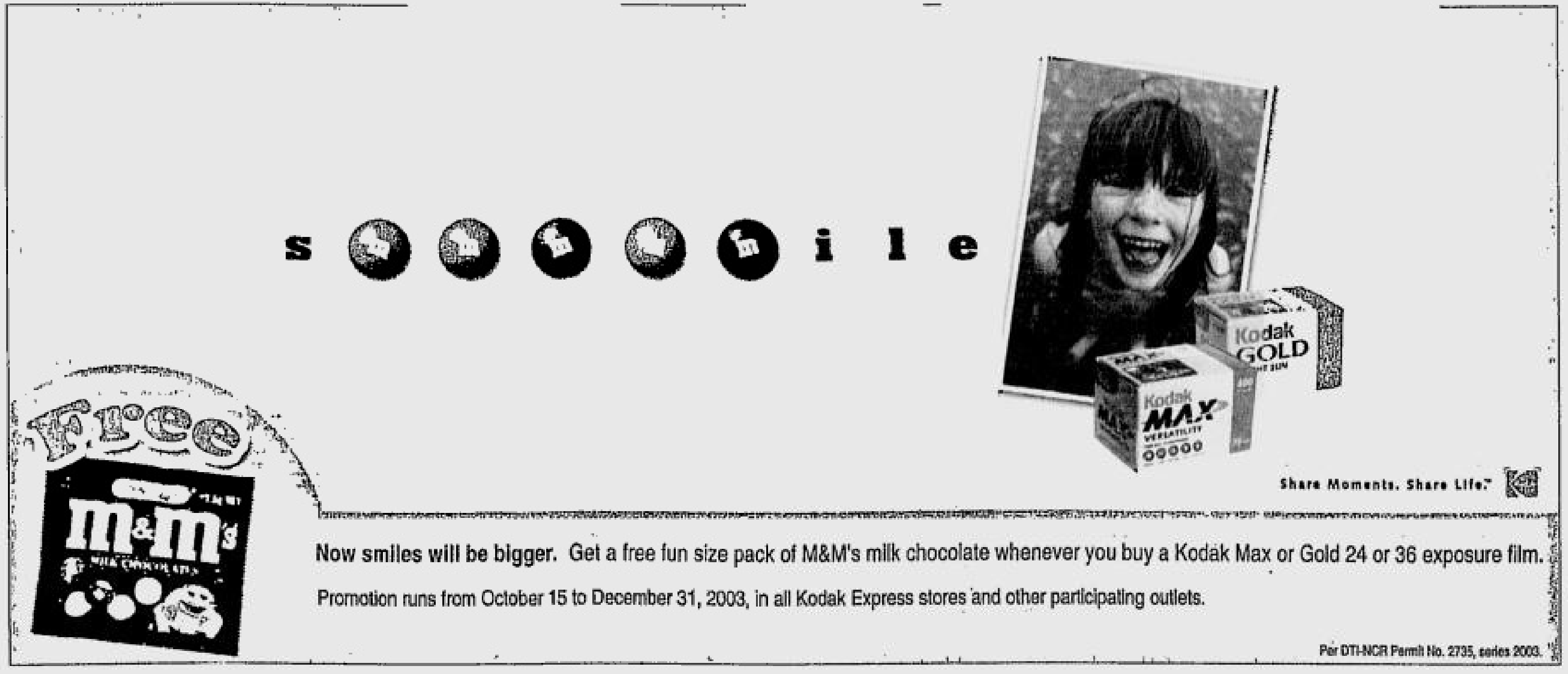
"When your emotions align with the Divine," she shares, "you understand more who you are." Also: "Health is also knowing your memories . . . If we could make peace with our individual emotions, we could not be manipulated to kill."

Another insight: "It is obvious that in the world today, most everyone is looking for a companion who might reflect the part of themselves that is missing. That seemed to be the ongoing anxiety of civilization for most people. Songs, literature, novels, jokes, religion and spiritual searching seemed to be motivated by a desire to find and connect with the missing half of ourselves."

The fun part is when she narrates the particulars of her long walk: how she got lost in the woods, suffered from diarrhea without a toilet in sight, was nearly bitten by ferocious dogs, feasted on by mosquitoes and chased by bees.

Through it all, MacLaine, perhaps the only Hollywood celebrity who has ever gone on the arduous pilgrimage on foot, endures the journey remarkably well and discovers more of herself and her relationship with the cosmos.

"The Camino tests a pilgrim's capacity to love," she explains. In the end, the journey also made her discover the path to a higher kind of love.



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Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 2735, series 2003.

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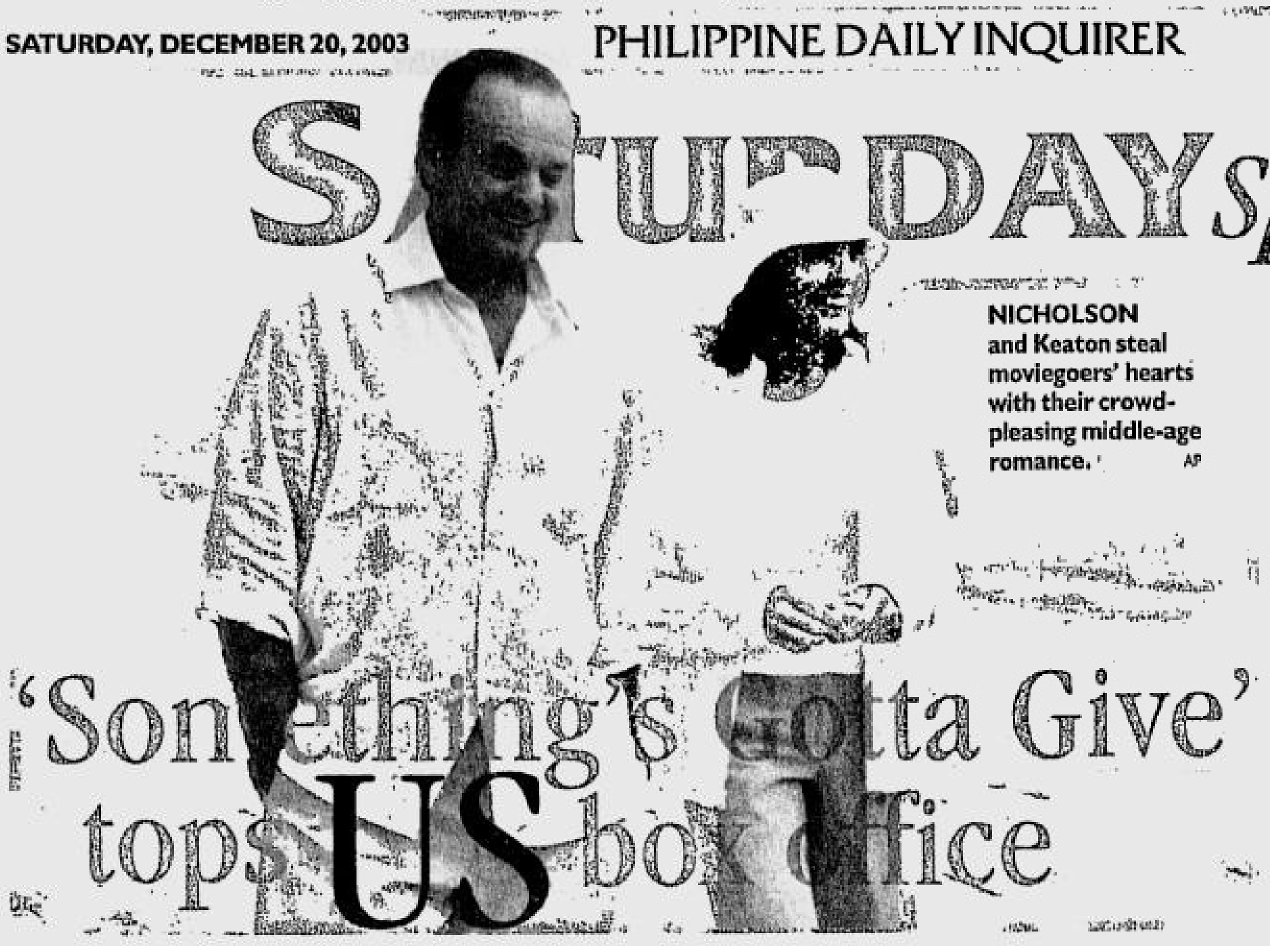


'Something's Gotta Give' tops US box office

NICHOLSON and Keaton steal moviegoers' hearts with their crowd-pleasing middle-age romance. AP

LOS ANGELES—Love conquered all at the North American box office at the weekend as a middle-aged romance between Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton stole the hearts of moviegoers and lopped "The Last Samurai" from the top spot.

"Something's Gotta Give" earned a modest $17 million in its first three days since opening on Dec. 12, but it was a better-than-expected debut for the film, which co-stars Keanu Reeves, Frances McDormand and Amanda Peet.

Above expectations

"This opening is above expectations and a surprise number one," said Jeff Blake, president of worldwide marketing and distribution and vice chairman of Sony Pictures Entertainment.

"I think most people believed the picture is terrific, but they questioned whether an adult audience could open a picture right away," Blake said.

With its appeal to more mature moviegoers who might be preoccupied with holiday shopping, the film had been expected to take in $12 million to $16 million in its opening weekend.

Two other new releases made it into the top 10 at the box office this weekend. "Stuck on You," starring Matt Damon and Greg Kinnear as conjoined twins who move to Hollywood, debuted at No. 3 with $10 million.

Decent start

"It was a decent start for pre-Christmas. Our audience gets out of school in the next week or so, so it all bodes well," said Bruce Snyder, president of domestic distribution for Fox. He said Fox expected the film, targeted at moviegoers under 25, to fare much better during the upcoming Christmas break.

"Love Don't Cost a Thing," an urban remake of the popular 1987 movie, "Can't Buy Me Love," starring Nick Cannon, came in at No. 4 with $6.5 million.

"Something's Gotta Give" was the ninth film from Sony Pictures to open at number one this year, beating the previous record of eight number one films set by Warner Bros. in 2001, Blake said.

In the film, Nicholson stars as a perennial playboy who falls for Diane Keaton, the mother of his latest youthful infatuation.

Tom Cruise's "The Last Samurai," also released by Warner Bros. Pictures, dropped to No. 2 at the box office with $14 million. "The Haunted Mansion," starring Eddie Murphy and released by Walt Disney Pictures, dropped to No. 5 with $6.3 million in sales from No. 3 last week.

Hit comedy

"Bad Santa," released by Miramax Films, also a unit of Walt Disney Co., maintained its No. 6 spot with $6.2 million. The hit comedy, "Elf," released by New Line Cinema, a unit of Time Warner Inc., dropped to No. 7 from No. 4 last week with $6.2 million.

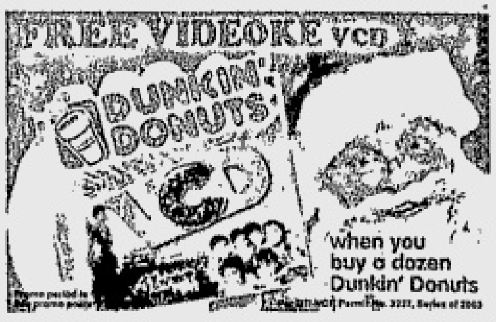
"Elf" held the total top-grossing spot among the top 10 films with $147.7 million.

Ticket sales for the top 12 films totaled $83 million, a 7 percent decline from last weekend and an 8 percent drop from the year-ago period, according to box office tracking firm Exhibitor Relations.

But ticket sales were expected to get a boost with last Wednesday's opening of "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," the final installment of Peter Jackson's trilogy.

Reuters

DAMON (left) and Kinnear play conjoined twins in "Stuck on You."



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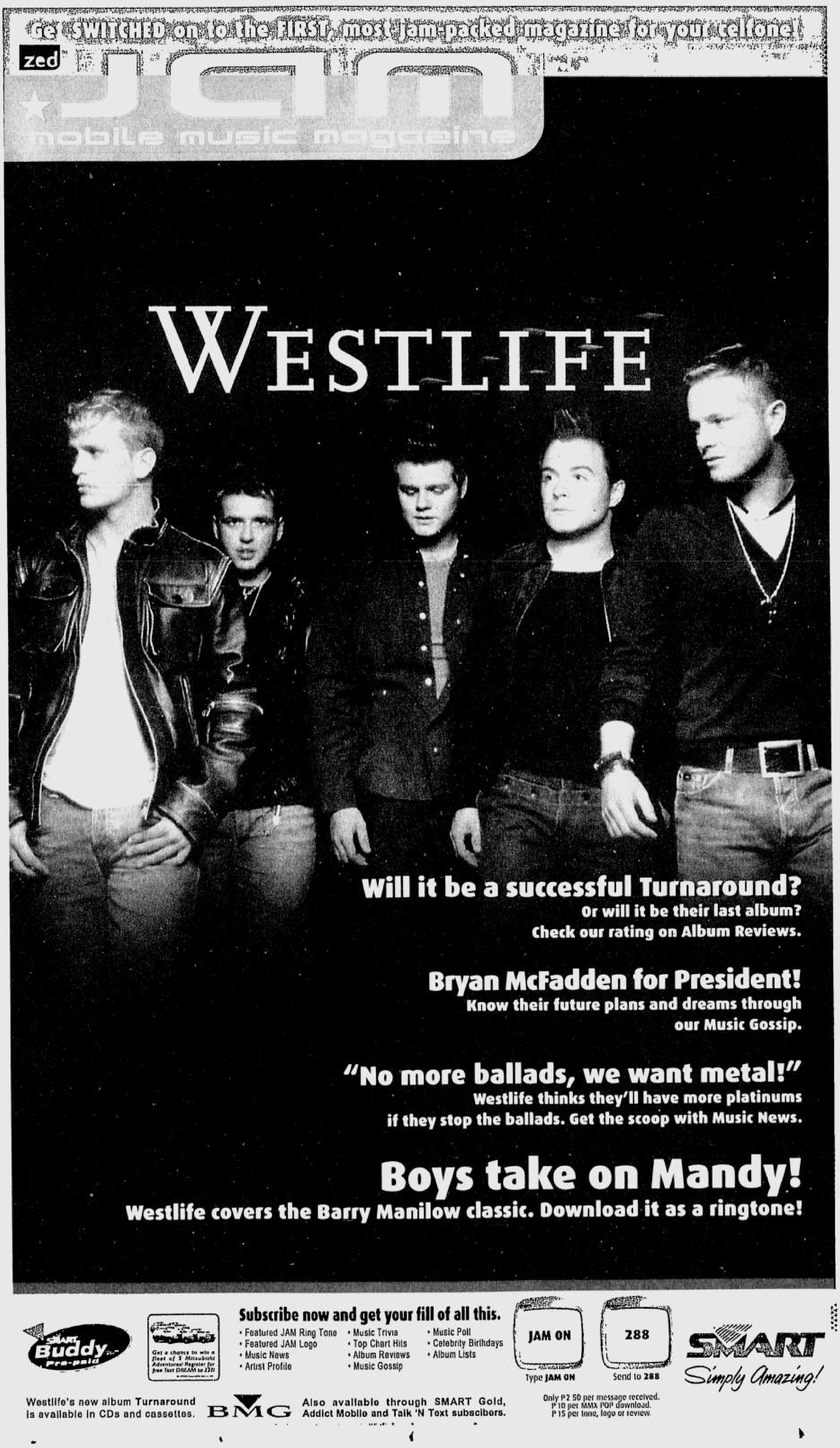

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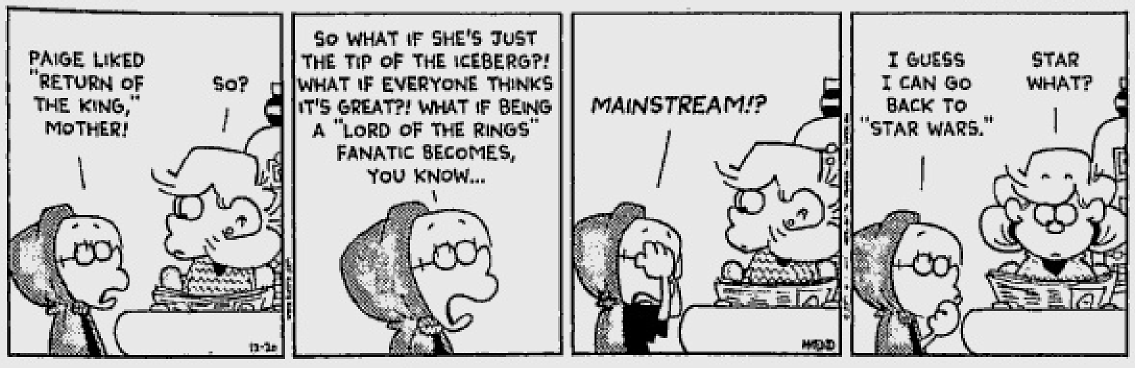
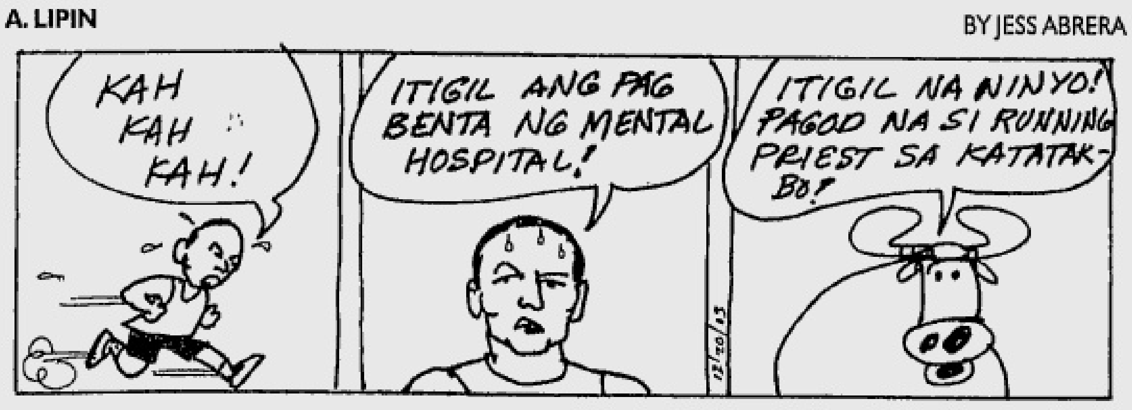
FOXTROT

BY BILL AMEND


PAIGE LIKED "RETURN OF THE KING," MOTHER!
SO?
SO WHAT IF SHE'S JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG?! WHAT IF EVERYONE THINKS IT'S GREAT?! WHAT IF BEING A "LORD OF THE RINGS" FANATIC BECOMES, YOU KNOW...
MAINSTREAM!?
I GUESS I CAN GO BACK TO "STAR WARS."
STAR WHAT?
12-20

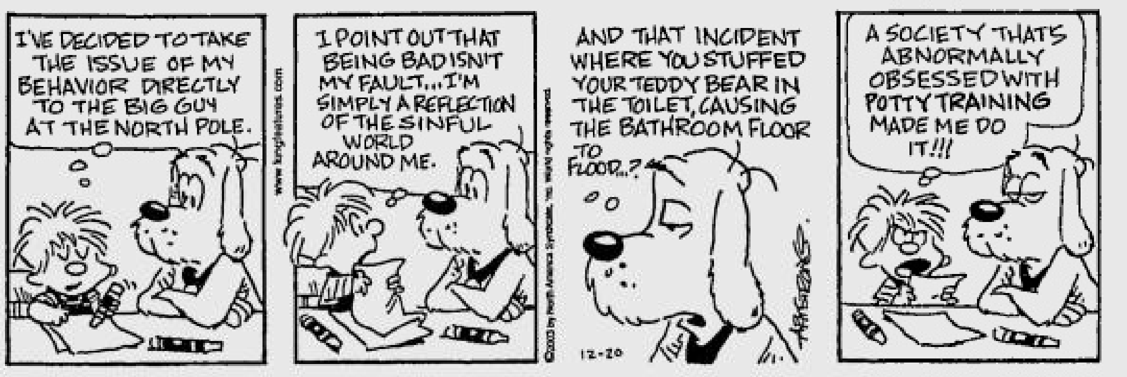
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


KAH KAH KAH!
ITIGIL ANG PAG BENTA NG MENTAL HOSPITAL!
ITIGIL NA NINYO! PAGOD NA SI RUNNING PRIEST SA KATATAK-BO!
12/20/03

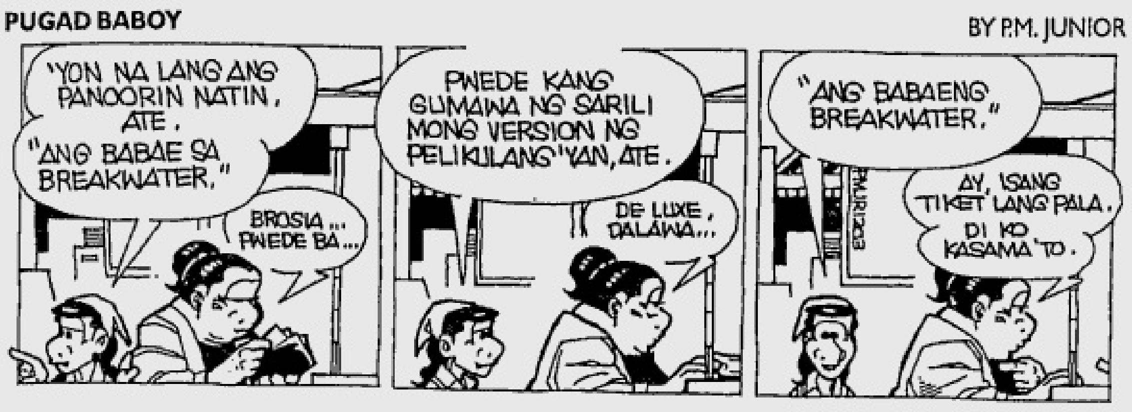
MARVIN

BY TOM ARMSTRONG


I'VE DECIDED TO TAKE THE ISSUE OF MY BEHAVIOR DIRECTLY TO THE BIG GUY AT THE NORTH POLE.
I POINT OUT THAT BEING BAD ISN'T MY FAULT...I'M SIMPLY A REFLECTION OF THE SINFUL WORLD AROUND ME.
AND THAT INCIDENT WHERE YOU STUFFED YOUR TEDDY BEAR IN THE TOILET, CAUSING THE BATHROOM FLOOR TO FLOOD..?
A SOCIETY THAT'S ABNORMALLY OBSESSED WITH POTTY TRAINING MADE ME DO IT!!!
12-20

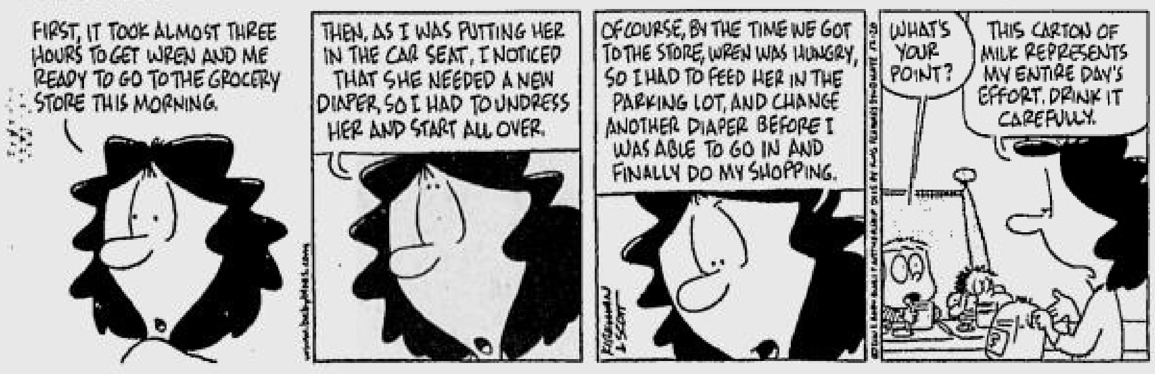
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


'YON NA LANG ANG PANOORIN NATIN, ATE. "ANG BABAE SA BREAKWATER."
BROSIA... PWEDE BA...
PWEDE KANG GUMAWA NG SARILI MONG VERSION NG PELIKULANG 'YAN, ATE.
DE LUXE, DALAWA...
"ANG BABAENG BREAKWATER."
AY, ISANG TIKET LANG PALA. DI KO KASAMA 'TO.

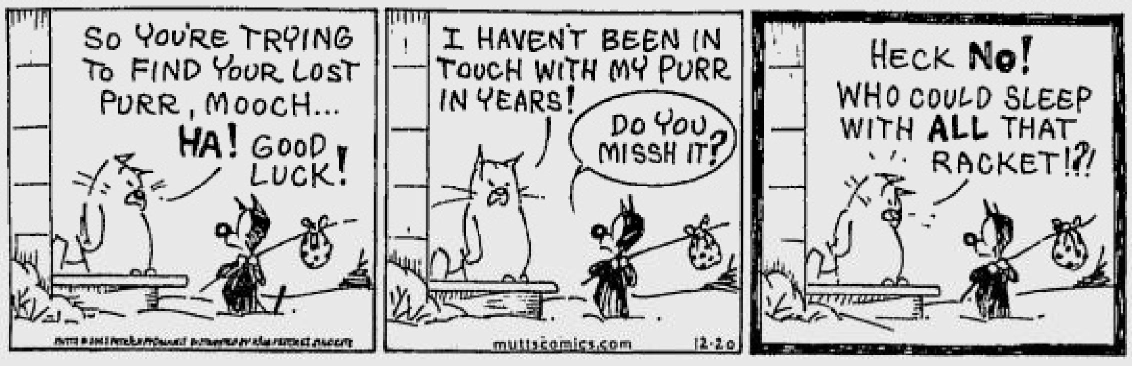
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


FIRST, IT TOOK ALMOST THREE HOURS TO GET WREN AND ME READY TO GO TO THE GROCERY STORE THIS MORNING.
THEN, AS I WAS PUTTING HER IN THE CAR SEAT, I NOTICED THAT SHE NEEDED A NEW DIAPER, SO I HAD TO UNDRESS HER AND START ALL OVER.
OF COURSE, BY THE TIME WE GOT TO THE STORE, WREN WAS HUNGRY, SO I HAD TO FEED HER IN THE PARKING LOT, AND CHANGE ANOTHER DIAPER BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO GO IN AND FINALLY DO MY SHOPPING.
WHAT'S YOUR POINT?
THIS CARTON OF MILK REPRESENTS MY ENTIRE DAY'S EFFORT. DRINK IT CAREFULLY.

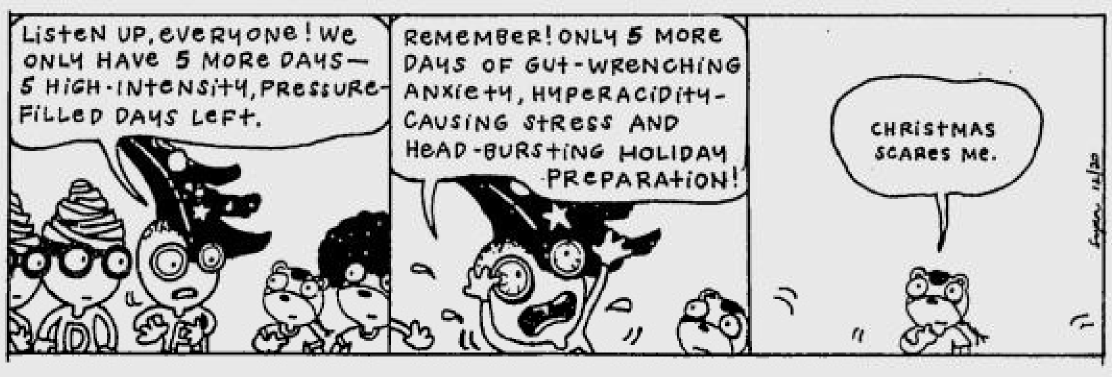
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


SO YOU'RE TRYING TO FIND YOUR LOST PURR, MOOCH...
HA! GOOD LUCK!
I HAVEN'T BEEN IN TOUCH WITH MY PURR IN YEARS!
DO YOU MISSH IT?
HECK NO! WHO COULD SLEEP WITH ALL THAT RACKET!?!
muttscomics.com
12-20

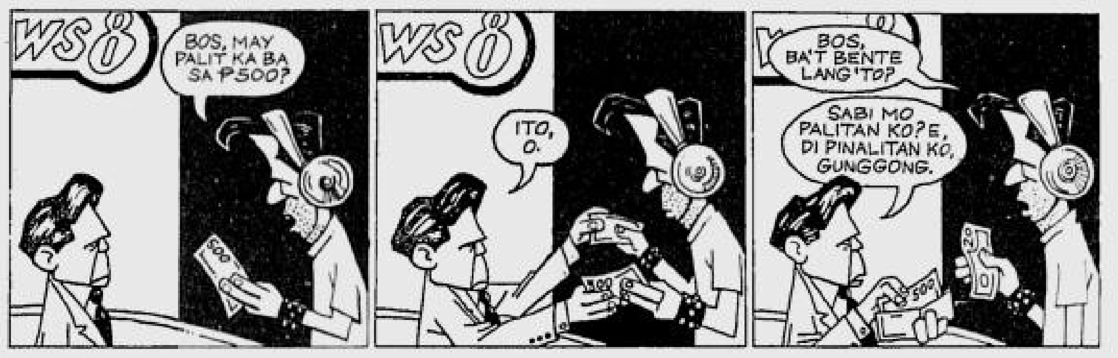
ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


LISTEN UP, EVERYONE! WE ONLY HAVE 5 MORE DAYS— 5 HIGH-INTENSITY, PRESSURE-FILLED DAYS LEFT.
REMEMBER! ONLY 5 MORE DAYS OF GUT-WRENCHING ANXIETY, HYPERACIDITY-CAUSING STRESS AND HEAD-BURSTING HOLIDAY PREPARATION!
CHRISTMAS SCARES ME.

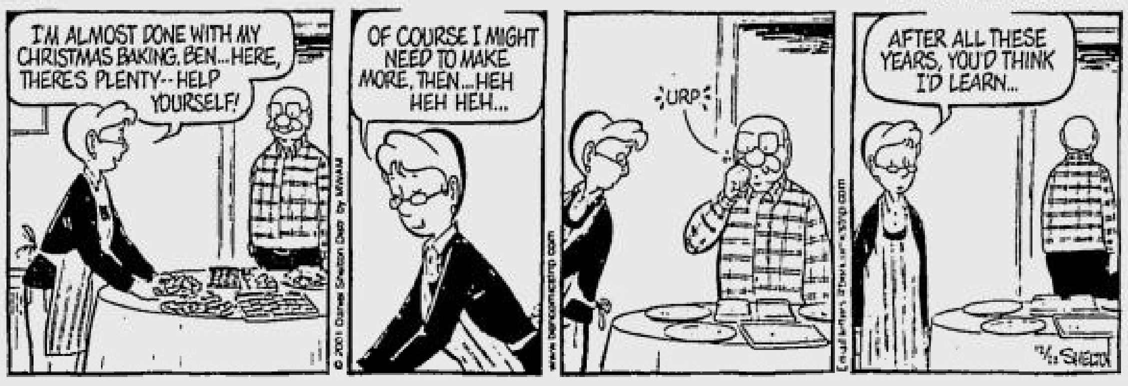
NEWSMARYOSEP

BY RON RUIZ


WS8
BOS, MAY PALIT KA BA SA P500?
ITO, O.
BOS, BA'T BENTE LANG 'TO?
SABI MO PALITAN KO? E, DI PINALITAN KO, GUNGGONG.

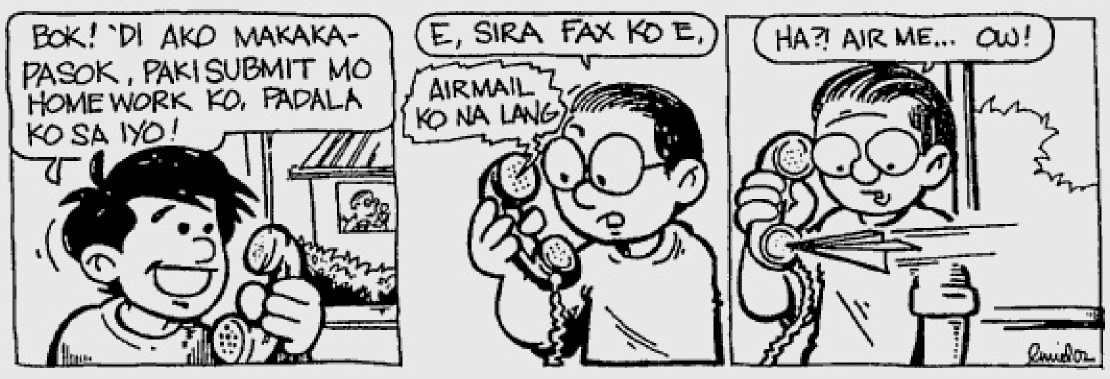
BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


I'M ALMOST DONE WITH MY CHRISTMAS BAKING. BEN...HERE, THERE'S PLENTY--HELP YOURSELF!
OF COURSE I MIGHT NEED TO MAKE MORE, THEN...HEH HEH HEH...
URP
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, YOU'D THINK I'D LEARN...

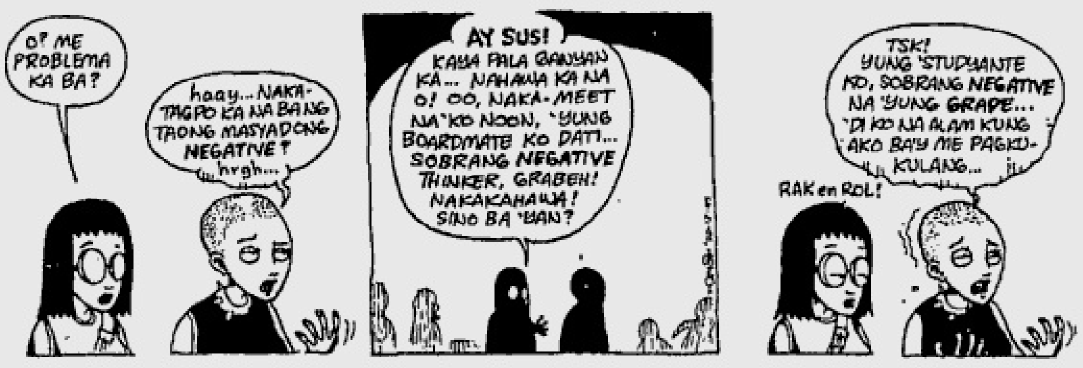
GENG'S GAMES

BY AMIEL RUFO


BOK! 'DI AKO MAKAKA-PASOK, PAKI SUBMIT MO HOMEWORK KO, PADALA KO SA IYO!
E, SIRA FAX KO E,
AIRMAIL KO NA LANG
HA?! AIR ME... OW!

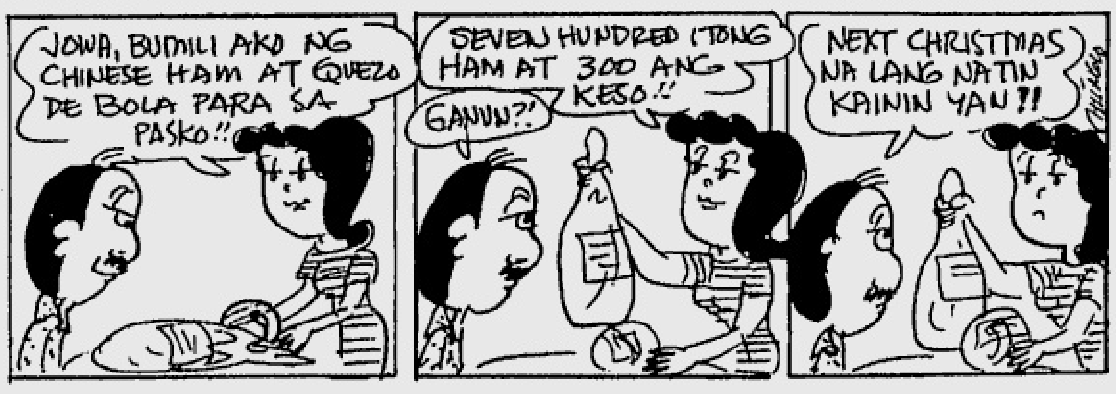
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


O? ME PROBLEMA KA BA?
haay... NAKA-TAGPO KA NA BANG TAONG MASYADONG NEGATIVE? hrgh...
AY SUS! KAYA PALA GANYAN KA... NAHAWA KA NA O! OO, NAKA-MEET NA 'KO NOON, 'YUNG BOARDMATE KO DATI... SOBRANG NEGATIVE THINKER, GRABEH! NAKAKAHAWA! SINO BA 'YAN?
TSK! YUNG 'STUDYANTE KO, SOBRANG NEGATIVE NA 'YUNG GRADE... 'DI KO NA ALAM KUNG AKO BA'Y ME PAGKU-KULANG...
RAK en ROL!

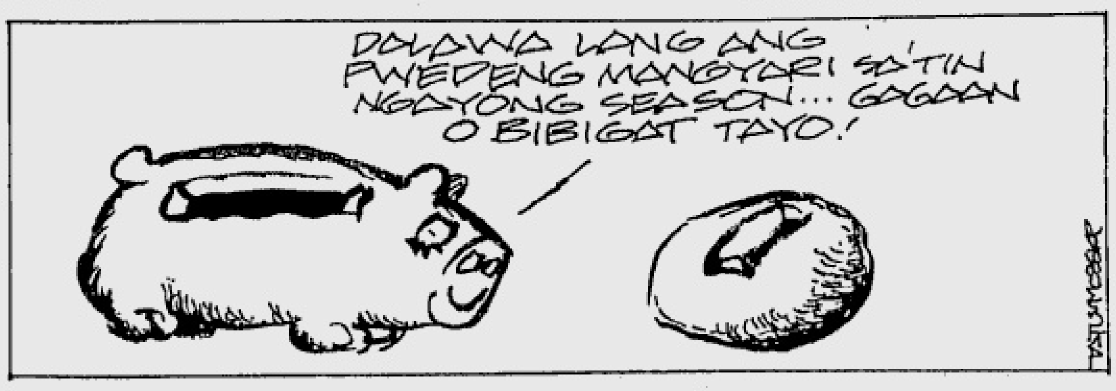
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


JOWA, BUMILI AKO NG CHINESE HAM AT QUEZO DE BOLA PARA SA PASKO!!
SEVEN HUNDRED ITONG HAM AT 300 ANG KESO!!
GANUN?!
NEXT CHRISTMAS NA LANG NATIN KAININ YAN?!

TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


DALAWA LANG ANG PWEDENG MANGYARI SA'TIN NGAYONG SEASON... GAGAAN O BIBIGAT TAYO!

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: Unusual things intrigue you. You're an explorer at heart, especially an explorer of philosophical thought. You have strong desires and often quickly follow your impulses. Whatever you do, you do with speed, ingenuity and effectiveness. You're extremely capable and productive. The year ahead focuses on your closest relationships.
Birthdate of: John Spencer, actor; Robert Urich, actor; Billy Bragg, musician.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): You are noticed more than usual, and people are impressed with you as well! You don't have to be super-strong now to succeed. You've got what it takes.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do." Therefore, eliminate harmful habits and begin to cultivate wholesome ones.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): You adore novelty! You need the stimulation of change in your life. Make plans to travel, enroll in a course or learn something new.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): In the month ahead, learn to work more closely with others. It's an excellent time to consult experts in whatever field you're involved in. You can benefit from counseling and advice

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Expect to focus more on health and hygiene matters in the next few weeks. Try to reduce eating junk food. Try to eat more fresh vegetables and fruit. (After all, you are what you eat.)

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): Your attitude toward all your relationships starts to lighten up now. Expect to seek out people who are fun. Your primary drive now is simply to do what you want!

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): For the next four weeks, focus on home, family and domestic issues much more than usual. You might have to meet the demands of a parent. Wrap up real estate details as well.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): In the week ahead, welcome any opportunities for contracts, negotiations or important agreements. Your schedule will definitely get busier now. (This is not a time to stay at home.)

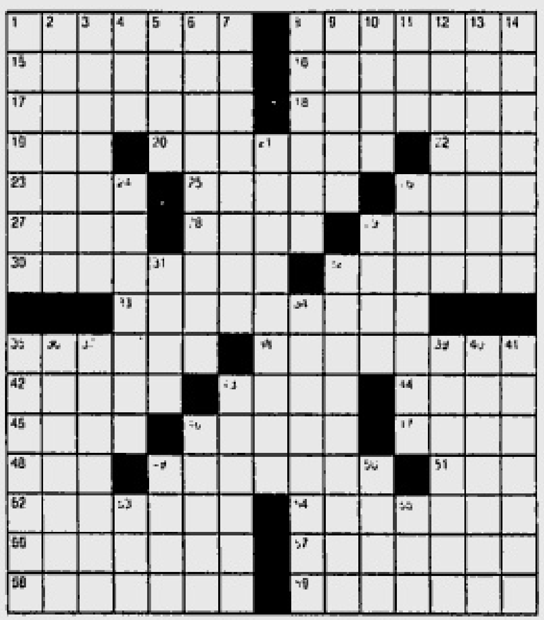
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Find someone you can talk to today about what you consider important in your life. Because you are testing your personal values now, you need someone to act as a sounding board for you.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): The Sun is entering your sign now. This means the next four weeks are your time to recharge your batteries for the rest of the year. You must put yourself first!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): All this socializing leaves you a bit exhausted! You need to replenish yourself. Try to seek out some solitude today.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Enjoy good times with friends now. Talking to others will help you formulate important plans you have for the future.

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Matthew Higgins
Concord, NH

12/20/03

ACROSS
1 Mixture
8 Strives
15 Verbena plant
16 Peter of "Bosom Buddies"
17 Flying without propulsion
18 Sprawling lazily
19 Horror-film street
20 Alternative to sawdust
22 Stag party attendees
23 Smokey or Yogi
25 Country singer Rimes
26 Fewer
27 Govern
28 Money __ everything
29 Bean variety
30 Hit man
32 NRA spokesman
33 Those held in custody
35 Play group?
38 Naval strength
42 Figure
43 Collar fastener
44 Pre-stereo sound
45 Clan division
46 Litigators
47 Cogito __ sum
48 William Tell's canton
49 Repeats without understanding
51 Beaver's handiwork
52 Rampaging
54 Green crops cut for livestock feed
56 One that got away
57 Whole number
58 Generous folk
59 Those on a quest

DOWN
1 Math course
2 Middle-ear bone
3 Critters
4 Inc. on the Isle of Man
5 Manner of moving on foot
6 Chroniclers
7 Antacid ingredient
8 Diagonally
9 Contempt
10 "54-40 or fight" president
11 Wisc. neighbor
12 Apparel
13 Che Guevara's first name
14 Enlists oneself
21 Four-minute mile breaker
24 Officially accept again
26 Supple and easily bent
29 Barest sound
31 Very dry
32 Cemetery marker
34 Emotional disorder
35 Guarantees
36 Hold dear
37 Cassava pudding
39 Verbiage
40 Booker
41 Lodgers
43 Sudden voltage increases
46 More rational
49 Corncob or briar
50 Location on the World Wide Web
53 Waterfront dive denizen
55 Albanian money

Friday's Puzzle Solved

S	E	R	F	■	S	C	R	I	P	■	P	A	D	S
P	A	I	R	■	T	A	I	G	A	■	O	B	O	E
A	S	F	A	R	A	S	P	O	S	S	I	B	L	E
R	E	F	■	O	T	T	E	R	■	P	S	A	L	M
■	■	■	D	O	U	R	■	■	S	O	O	■	■	■
■	F	R	O	M	S	O	U	P	T	O	N	U	T	S
M	E	A	L	Y	■	■	L	O	A	F	■	G	O	O
A	L	I	T	■	L	I	N	D	Y	■	A	R	A	B
L	O	S	■	S	U	V	A	■	■	S	W	I	S	S
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12/20/03

Hilda turns out to be a delightful comedienne

By Nestor U. Torre

WHEN she was a Lea Productions star in the '70s, Hilda Koronel was a much-admired dramatic star. Her comic turn in her new film, "Crying Ladies," is a big shift for her, therefore.

But those who know Hilda personally can attest to her being a spirited, fun-loving person away from the cameras.

Colorful characterization

So, they aren't surprised by her colorful characterization in Mark Meily's film of a former movie starlet and current stage mother who yearns to re-live her glory days in local movies through her lovely daughter who, unfortunately, is a most reluctant starlet.

"Crying Ladies" topbills Sharon Cuneta, but Hilda comes on strong in her co-starring role. Like Sharon, she isn't afraid to deglamorize herself just to make her role truly textured and idiosyncratic.

After all, as she shared in a recent TV interview, she's already a grandmother, so she can well afford to let her hair down, aesthetically speaking. Still, her loyal admirers (including us) remember that, when she was a young teen in the '70s, she was one of the most beautiful actresses in Filipino movies—aside from being one of the best.

Luminous

Her beauty was so luminous that directors of cinematography could take extreme close-ups of her young face, and no blemishes or bad angles were revealed.

This, in fact, was how the late, great Lino Brocka, her mentor throughout their respective careers, "introduced" her to film audiences in his FPJ starrer, "Santiago": Within the bleak visual context of a house razed to the ground during a firefight in World War Two, some ashes fell off, and Hilda's beautiful face was dranatically revealed.

Literally reborn out of the embers of war, her character symbolized man's determination to survive despite the ravages of violence and evil—an unforgettable opening shot that her precocious beauty and talent richly deserved.

KORONEL. Role in "Crying Ladies" is a big shift for her.

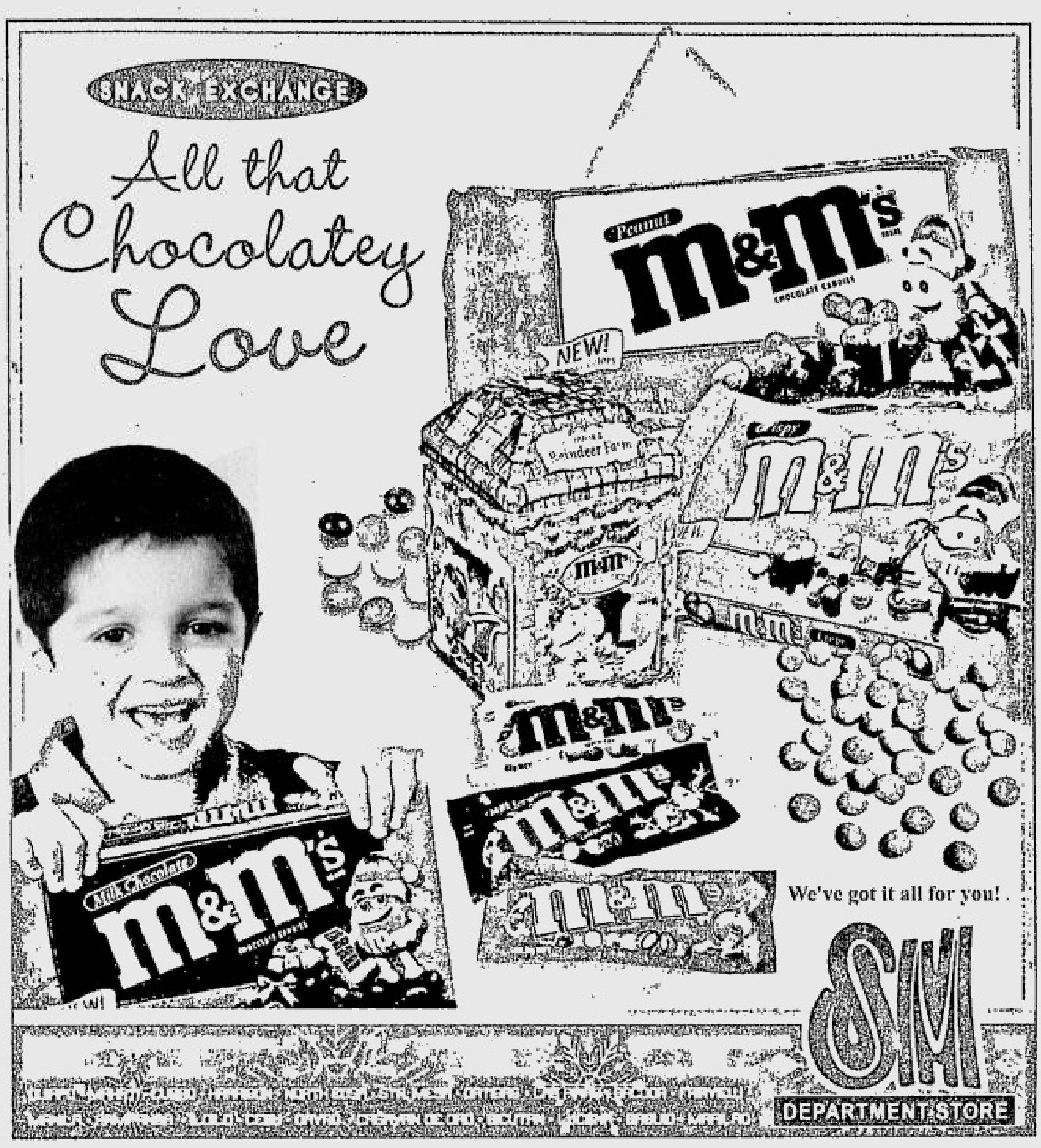
In Hilda's other movies, Brocka succeeded at another equally difficult task: to take the 14-year-old girl, and transform her into a young-adult dramatic actress. This took all of her talent and his sleight of cinema, but they did it, and Hilda's dramatic vehicles clicked with the viewing public, despite her tender age.

European film buffs

In time, even European film buffs would be captivated by Hilda's beauty and talent, when some of her Brocka-directed movies were screened in prestigious international film festivals.

At one such major filmfest, Hilda got even more newspaper space than some well-known international actresses. It just goes to show that, when talent is as obviously exceptional as it is in Hilda's case, it will definitely shine and be recognized, no matter where.

So, let's all welcome Hilda Koronel back to the movie screen that she conquered when she was so young that it has practically become her birthright. Her luminous glory days may be over, but her talent remains as excellent as it's ever been, and she has many memorable and colorful performances left in her—if producers would only showcase them!



AM/FM

Rare instance of vocal 'reassignment' on dzSR

By Rito P. Asilo

WHEN we recently tuned in to Wave 89.1's "Wave Back Wednesday" show on FM after 9 p.m., we were pleased to note that its "retro" thrust offers a refreshing spin on the widely popular "hit-back" format.

Lack of focus

On most shows that feature old favorites, the repertoire is often too wide-ranging. There is a general lack of focus on the kind of songs featured—like, you can hear Elvis Presley yodeling his cover of a country tune alongside Rachel Alejandro's "Mr. Kupido," The Carpenters' "Mr. Postman," Sheryl Cruz's "Mr. Dream Boy" and Victor Wood's "Mr. Blue." A "past hit" could be any popular song from the early 20th century to something as current as last year's.

While "Wave Back Wednesday" does feature hit songs, the selections don't go as far back as the '70s. It also wisely chooses chart-topping tunes that have not lost their "cool" quotient from over-exposure, the way Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You" and Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On" did in the '90s.

We were delighted to hear Artstart's dreamy "Misty Glass Window" and Shanice's cover of Minnie Ripperton's "Loving You." (Yes, it's that song Lani Misalucha sings when she feels the need to lie on her back.)

This newer version features Janet Jackson-style cooing, a strong and clear girly voice, and a refreshing arrangement that, thankfully, doesn't veer away too much from the original. And instead of the conspicuous tweeting of birds in Ripperton's version, the R&B star's cover uses ocean waves for more saccharine effect. How sweet—and original!

Trivia

When we pressed the AM button, we found our way to an interesting show on PBS' Sports Radio dzSR (918 kHz), a specialized station on the AM band that features trivia (last Wednesday, on basketball) and commonly used jargon (in shooting).

To break the monotony, songs (mostly "new wave" staples from the '80s, like China Crisis' "Wishful Thinking," Industry's "State of the Nation" and Fra Lippo Lippi's "Some People") were smartly interspersed between the show's unique sections. We were appropriately impressed!

ENRIQUEZ. She's no baritone!

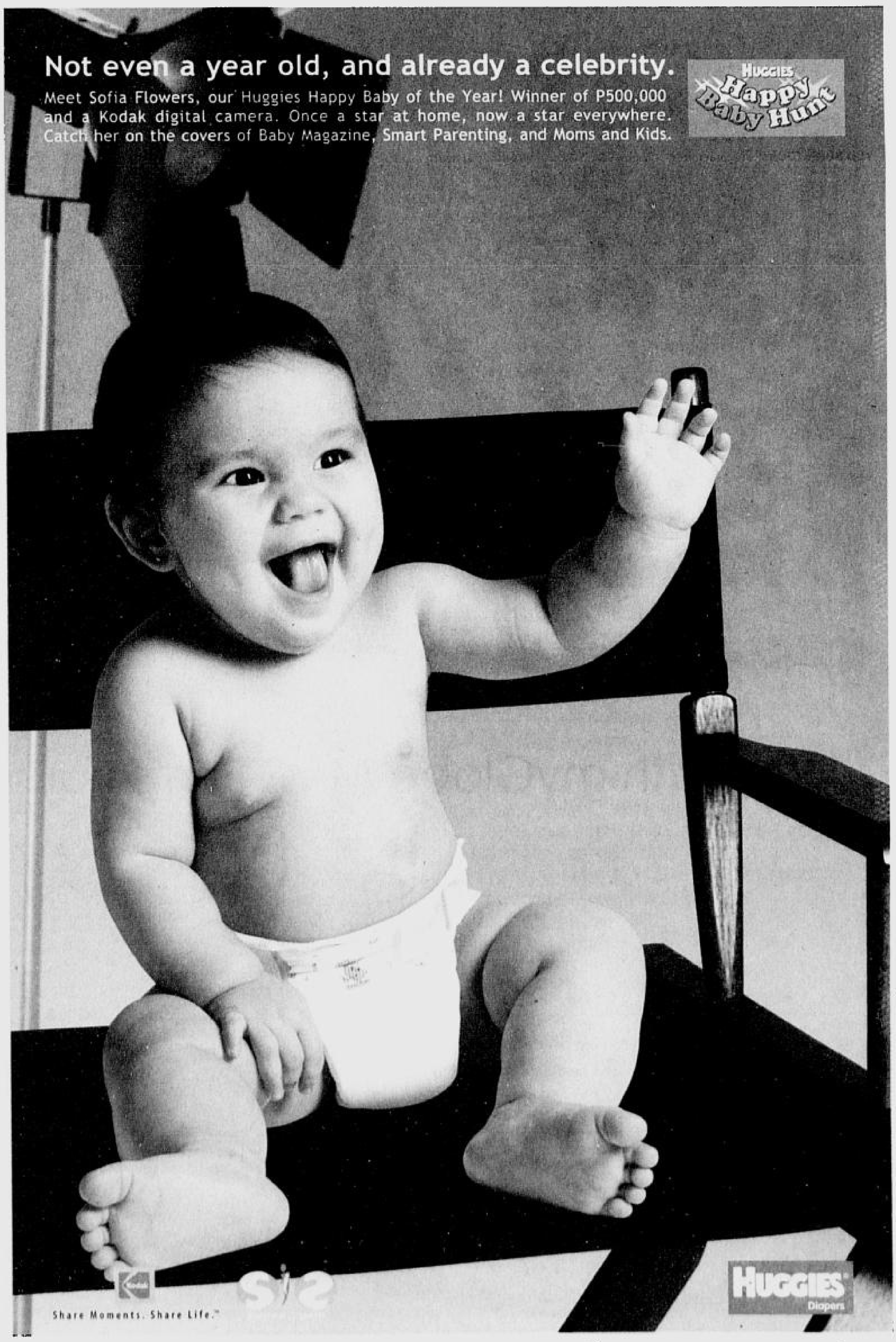
—And then, something happened. During a song break, we heard the familiar opening strain of Fil-Am Jocelyn Enriquez's dance hit with Amber and Ultra Nate, "If You Could Read My Mind"—but this one had a different tempo, a much slower one (like the *Pandangguhan*?).

Cover version

We thought we were listening to a newer, slower cover version, sung by a man—but the arrangement was suspiciously the same. When the song ended, the hostess acted like nothing happened. But when the next song (Spandau Ballet's "Round and Round") came, it was obvious something was wrong: Tony Hadley sounded like the booming voice of God in *cenakulos*! (Think Ellen DeGeneres and her whalespeak in "Finding Nemo.")

It turned out that they forgot to adjust the speed of their record player (still on vinyl?). They managed to salvage Hadley's song in time for the line, "I wanna be your final history."

Poor Jocelyn Enriquez, though, sang her song throughout in a weird display of vocal "reassignment"—from an alto, she suddenly became a baritone!


Not even a year old, and already a celebrity.

Meet Sofia Flowers, our Huggies Happy Baby of the Year! Winner of P500,000 and a Kodak digital camera. Once a star at home, now a star everywhere. Catch her on the covers of Baby Magazine, Smart Parenting, and Moms and Kids.

At last, an award for 'novelty king' Yoyoy Villame

By Andy P. Bais

FINALLY, long-overdue recognition was given to our favorite king of novelty songs, Yoyoy Villame. He is this year's Kapuso Liifetime Achievement Awardee, honored by GMA-7 for his "significant and lasting contributions to the growth and development of Filipino music."

Broken English

Indeed, who doesn't know our country's history "taught" in broken English in "Magellan," the health conscious' favorite, "Mag-exercise Tayo Tuwing Umaga," or the tongue-twisting "Butse Kik"?

For more than three decades, the former jeepney and bus driver from Bohol has given us spicy servings of his idiosyncratic musical gift in the more than 40 albums that he has recorded.

Yoyoy became a singer out of necessity: He had to sing while driving because his bus didn't have a radio. And so, his passengers enjoyed his comical chants and witty lyrics for the duration of the trip.

Unique musical gift

Yoyoy was so good that, soon after, word got around about his unique musical gift. Thus, he extended his performance: In between trips, he entertained passengers at the terminal with his comic compositions. Realizing that his driver would be more effective as an entertainer, Leo Meneses, the owner of the bus company, advised Yoyoy to record his songs.

VILLAME. His song, "Magellan," sold 200,000 copies.

His first hit, "Magellan," was a phenomenal success, not only in the Visayas but in Metro Manila as well, selling 200,000 copies! His follow-up albums were also bestsellers, even if most of them were in Cebuano.

Eventually, Yoyoy relocated to Manila where he spread his performing wings to include the movies. His first film was "Limasawa."

Most recently, he was featured in Mario O' Hara "Ang Babae sa Breakwater," where he was a delight playing a chorus of one between the movie's scenes, singing his latest compositions and some Cebuano folk songs.

Classic hits

It was also a joy recently seeing the 71-year-old singer-comedian grinning from ear to ear on TV while watching comedian Joey de Leon perform a medley of his classic hits during the MetroPop finals night, where he received his award.

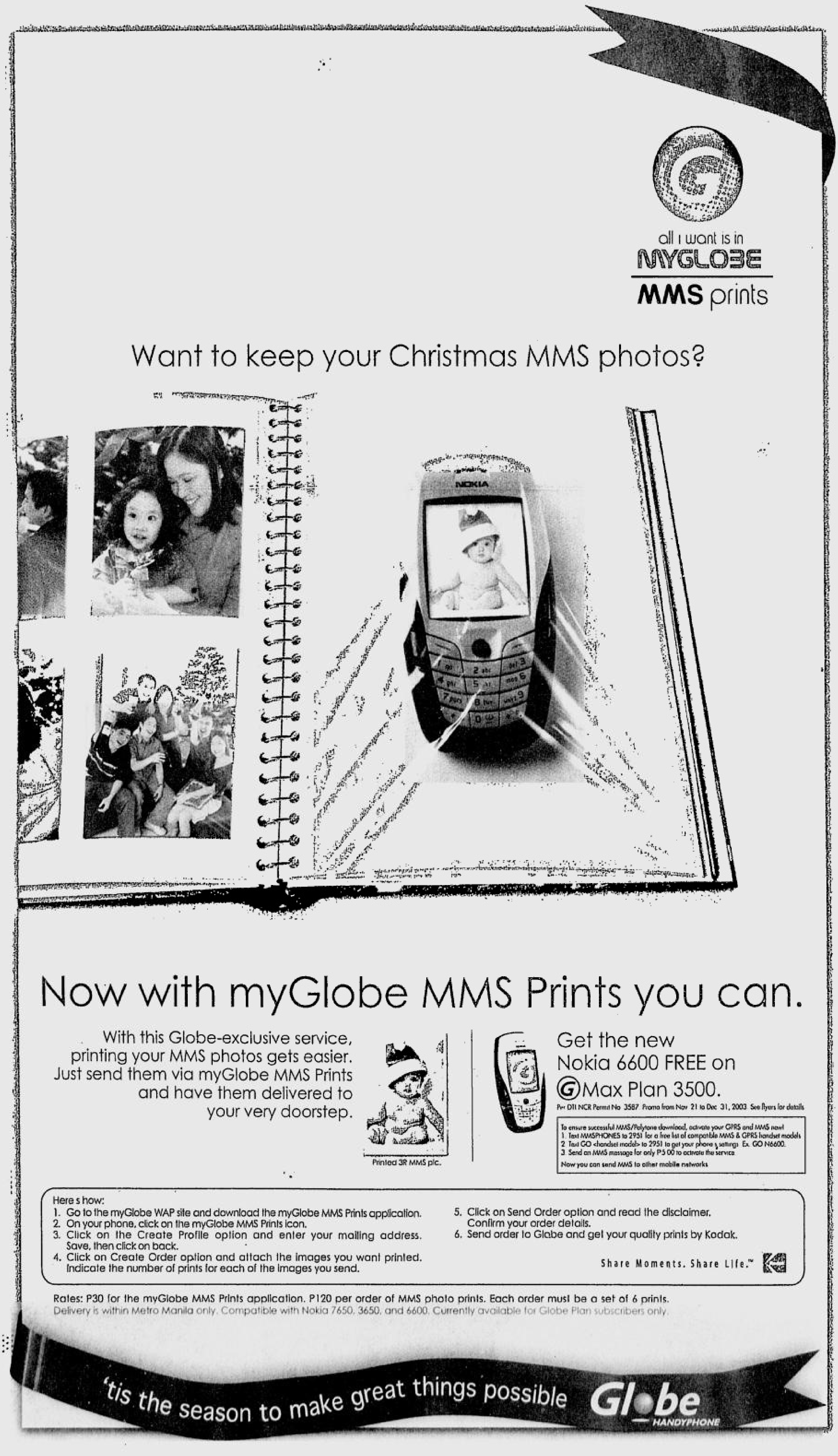
We were moved by his acceptance speech: "*Gusto ko sanang sumali sa* MetroPop, *pero sabi nila, pang-inuman lang ang kanta ko.*"

With his Ramon Orlina glass sculpture trophy in hand, he surely had the last laugh.

Pain

We also felt his pain when he thanked even those who continue to buy his pirated CDs and cassette tapes: "*Salamat sa pakikinig sa mga* pirated *na awitin ko. Yung huli naming* album, *hindi na kami nag*-release, *baka ma*-pirate *lang, sayang. Kung saan kami pumupunta, doon na lang kami nagbebenta.*"

We hope that Yoyoy continues to write songs and distribute them commercially. And we, in turn, promise to buy *only* his original CDs!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FERNANDO Poe Jr. (right) with Speaker Joe de Venecia and First Daughter Luli Arroyo at the Bulong-Pulungan.

Festive montage of holiday activities

STREET SMART

Mandy Navasero

MANNA Merk, 3, played Santa with the Centex kids' choir and entertained children in a special Christmas party at Merk's Bar Bistro last Sunday. Parents Richard and Ronnie Merk wore traditional Santa outfits, adding to the Christmas spirit.

Opportunity

The Centex Choir, composed of students from Tondo, has been given an opportunity to share its members' talents in various events.

This was the second annual traditional event at Merk's intended to reach out to children.

Meanwhile, at the Bulong-Pulungan's Annual Christmas party at the Westin Philippine Plaza, presidential aspirants Fernando Poe Jr. and Raul Roco joined First Daughter Luli Arroyo and Speaker Joe de Venecia (who is celebrating his birthday on Dec. 25) with other celebrities. *Manay* Gina de Venecia also announced that she was running for a seat in the Senate.

Procession

On the other hand, the 19th-century icon in wood and elaborate silver frame, Nuestra Señora de la Soledad of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, recently joined the Marian procession in Intramuros.

The framed holy image vanished in 1982 under mysterious circumstances. The townsfolk of San Isidro, led by Mayor Sonia R. Lorenzo, prayed for its return. An extensive search for the image led to its return to the church of San Isidro. It received due homage at the Dec. 1, 2002 Intramuros Marian procession.

Alay-Lakad Commemorative Plates are now available at the Alay Lakad Foundation Inc., at tel. nos. 523-1539 or 522-6134. These plates, valid until Nov. 16, 2004, are approved and authorized by the DOTC through the recommendation of Local Government Secretary Joey Lina (an ALFI trustee). This is a fundraising campaign to finance ALFI's socio-economic projects for out-of-school youth spearheaded by Alay Lakad president Frank Evaristo.

Photoworkshop

Our three-day photoworkshops include hands-on exercises and critique, and will run every Saturday of the month on Jan. 10, 17 and 24; Feb. 7, 21 and 22 and Mar. 6, 13 and 20, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Suite 227, LRI Business Plaza, 210 Nicanor Garcia st. (formerly Reposo st.), Bel-Air II Village, Makati City, with guest lecturer David Hanson. Sponsors are Fuji Film, Avenue Photo Supply and Apperture Trading.

For inquiries call 896-3208 or 899-1767 or 0916 706-0130 or e-mail at mn_photocom@i-manila.com.ph or mandynavaseropro@yahoo.com.

SATURDAY Special

Tobey Maguire likes web-slinging much better than horse racing

MAGUIRE. His heft and weight have fluctuated wildly for his various movie roles.

LOS ANGELES—"Spider-Man" star Tobey Maguire says working on stunts as the comic-book webslinger was a lot easier on his body than riding a 540-kilogram (1,200-pound) thoroughbred for his role as jockey Red Pollard for the horse-race drama, "Seabiscuit."

Training

"I did all this training for 10 weeks. Then, I got on a horse for the first time. When I got off, my legs were like noodles," he told the Associated Press.

"I was working out, getting really strong and losing a lot of weight, but when you get on a real horse, it's a whole different deal," he said. "You're using all the stabilizing muscles in your legs, and balancing on the balls of your feet on this 1,200-pound elite athlete."

Back injury

The 28-year-old, who has a longtime back injury that makes stunts difficult, said his heft and weight have fluctuated wildly in recent years for his various movie roles.

He put on weight and muscle to star in 2002's "Spider-Man," then shed as much as possible to appear gaunt in "Seabiscuit." Then, it was back to building muscle to bulk up for "Spider-Man II," which is set to debut next year. *AP*

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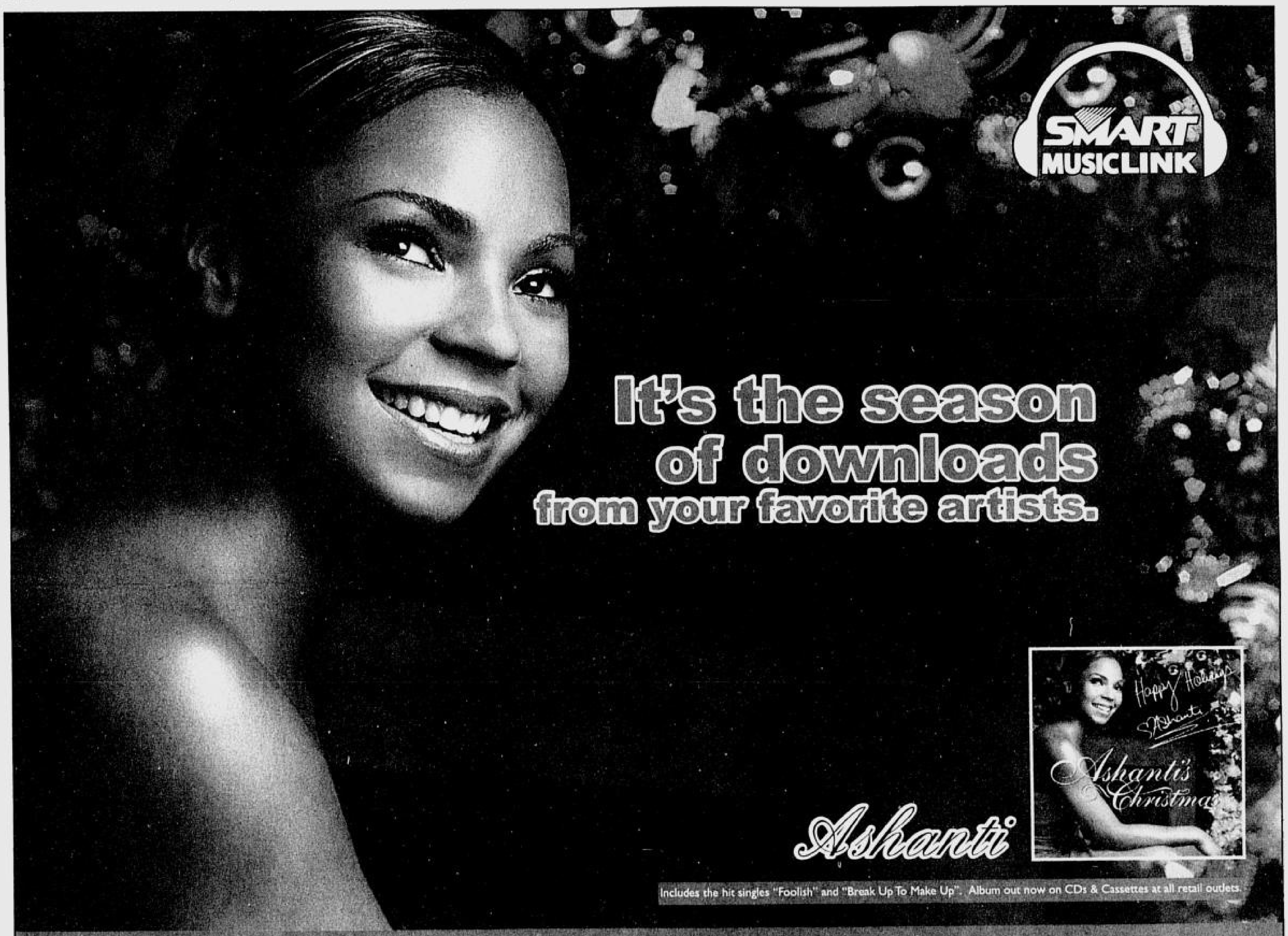

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Gregorian
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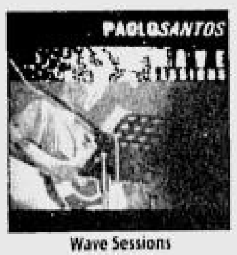
Keyword: Imagine

Remixed and Revisited
Madonna
Into The Hollywood Groove
Keyword: in2dhollywud

As Time Goes By
Rod Stewart
Till There Was You
Keyword: therewasu



Wave Sessions
Paolo Santos
Be My No. 2
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Sleigh Ride	Hilary Duff	sleighride
Anywhere But Here	Hilary Duff	anywhere
Sweet Sixteen	Hilary Duff	sweet16
So Yesterday	Hilary Duff	soyesterday
Workin It Out	Hilary Duff	workinitout
Why Not	Hilary Duff	whynot
Frosty The Snowman	Harry Connick, Jr.	snowman
Silver Bells	Harry Connick, Jr.	silverbells
Silent Night	Whitney Houston	silentnight
Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas	Whitney Houston	littlexmas
Christmas Song	Michael Bublé	xmassong
White Christmas	Michael Bublé	whitexmas
I'll Be Home For Christmas	Michael Bublé	home4xmas

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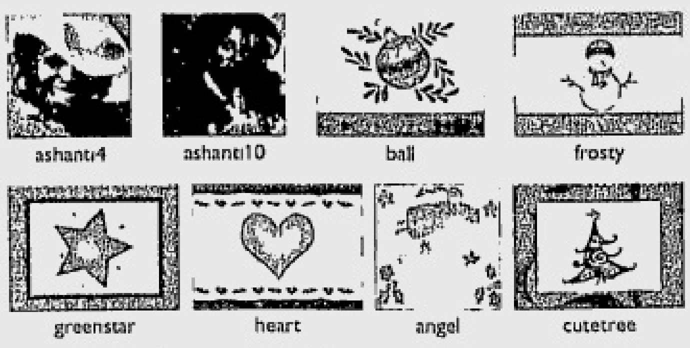

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1. **Closer**
   Josh Groban
2. **Let It Snow**
   Michael Bublé
3. **Wave Sessions**
   Paolo Santos
   keyword: *bemyno2*
4. **The Chillout Project House Sessions**
   Various Artists
   keyword: *whaturtome*
5. **As Time Goes By**
   Rod Stewart
   keyword: *therewasu*
6. **Michael Bublé**
   Michael Buble
7. **Perfectly Acoustic**
   Various Artists
   keyword: *seemecrying*
8. **Dreamsounds**
   Various Artists
   keyword: *becauseofu*
9. **Tunog Acoustic**
   Various Artists
10. **AKA 2: Almost Kinda Acoustic 2**
    Various Artists
11. **Akustik Natin**
    Various Artists
12. **It Had To Be You**
    Rod Stewart
13. **Christmas With The Ratpack**
    Various Artists
14. **Long Ago Tomorrow**
    Siobhan Pettit
15. **Movie Album**
    Barbra Streisand
16. **Totally Bublé**
    Michael Buble
17. **Remixed and Revisited**
    Madonna
    keyword: *in2dhollywud*
18. **Bigotilyo**
    Parokya Ni Edgar
19. **Coverage**
    Mandy Moore
    keyword: *breakingin2*
20. **Badly Browned**
    Rex Navarette
21. **Piano Player**
    Maksim
22. **Masters Of Chant IV**
    Gregorian
    keyword: *imagine*
23. **Popstar/A Dream Come True**
    Sarah Geronimo
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    Red Hot Chili Peppers
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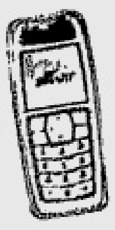

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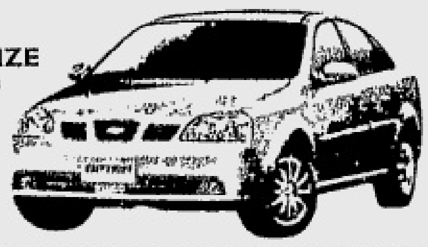

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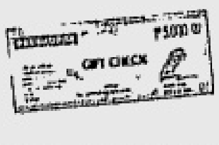

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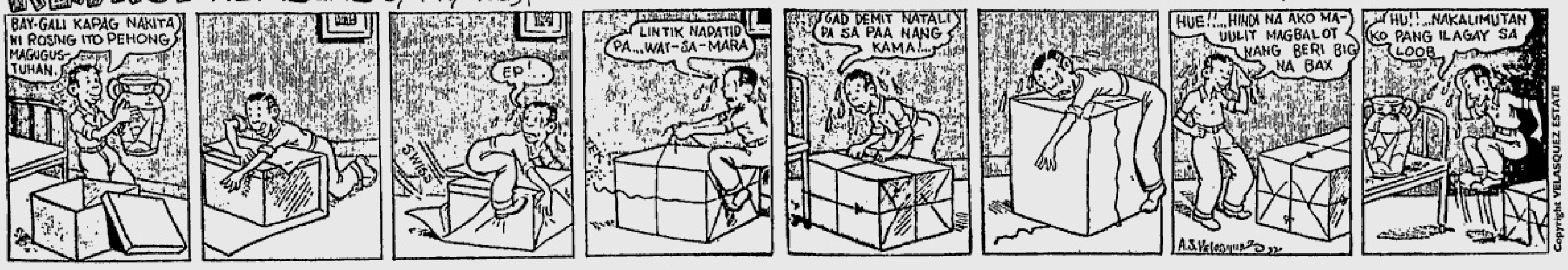
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GAD DEMIT NATALI PA SA PAA NANG KAMA!...
HUE!!...HINDI NA AKO MA-UULIT MAGBALOT NANG BERI BIG NA BAX
HU!!...NAKALIMUTAN KO PANG ILAGAY SA LOOB
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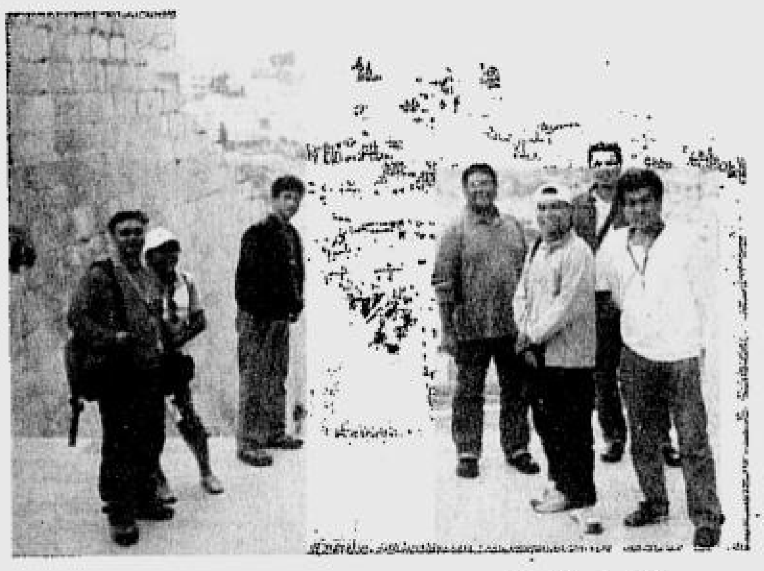
Scenes for 'Filipinas' shot in the Holy Land

By Nestor U. Torre


VIVA film crew, headed by Lamangan (center right), in Bethlehem, outside the Church of the Nativity.

STAFFERS and hosts inside Israeli residence used as a set for the film.

VIEWERS who watch the Metro filmfest entry, "Filipinas," will be impressed to see some scenes shot abroad, most especially a number of key sequences filmed in Israel. Combined with scenes recreated locally, they show one of the Filipinas siblings, played by Dawn Zulueta, working as a caregiver in Israel, and witnessing another OCW being blown up in a terrorist attack.

Thematic range

Those sequences imbue the film with added thematic range and pertinence, so Viva Films decided to shoot some of them in Israel, with director Joel Lamangan heading a production team of film artists and craftsmen who weren't daunted by reports of ongoing violence in the Middle East.

Substantial additional expense was involved in flying the Viva staffers to Israel, and taking care of their hotel, meals and local transport. But Viva didn't hesitate to provide the extra budget, because the scenes in the Holy Land would add credence and impact to some of the film's thematic and dramatic points.

To get a detailed account of the Israel shoot for "Filipinas," we contacted the travel agent who accompanied the Viva group to Israel last Nov. 1. Rona Onglao works with Journeys of Faith, which specializes in Catholic pilgrimages and cruises to Europe, the Holy Land and other religious sites and shrines all over the world. She recalls:

"The Viva Films people I accompanied to the Holy Land did not go there primarily on pilgrimage, but to shoot location scenes for their film.

"The production is significant because it's Viva's entry to the Metro Manila Film Festival, and is about a Filipino family that strives to be united despite being separated by distance, conflicting interests and clashing personalities. I was proud to be facilitating things in Israel for such a substantial production.

"Taking a brief rest after our exhausting flight, we were all raring to tour the Holy City. Atop Mt. Scopus and the Mount of Olives, we got our first panoramic glimpse of Jerusalem, with its golden Dome of the Rock gleaming in the sunlight. It was a magnificent view!

"Director Joel Lamangan and his crew could not help but immediately take a magnificent aerial shot of the city.

Chapel of the Ascension

"After visiting the Chapel of the Ascension, we went to the Pater Noster, the place where Jesus Christ taught the Lord's Prayer to his disciples. All over the place were ceramic tiles with the Lord's Prayer in various languages. We were delighted to find not just one but three major Filipino dialects, with the Lord's Prayer written in Tagalog, Bisaya and Kapampangan.

Mosaic

"At the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, the mosaic of the Filipino version of the image of Our Lady was strategically located at the church's entrance. We felt so proud!

"But the sightseeing we did was done on the side, as the group's main focus was on shooting scenes for 'Filipinas.' *Direk* Joel set the example for the group in terms of professional work ethic: he was invariably ready 30 minutes before call time!

"We met extremely hospitable and generous Palestinian Christians, like our tour guide, Frank, and his wife Mary, who lent their home for the shoot. Also very helpful were our bus driver Abraham, and Sana, our local tour operator.

"After shooting, the Viva film group would go on a gastronomic 'tour' of Israeli cuisine. We had terrific local food, starting with many interesting salads like *hummus* (chick peas), red beets, mushrooms and green vegetables. Spread on freshly-baked pita bread, it tasted heavenly!

"I can't forget the time when we ate at the Bahadian family's restaurant. We couldn't believe our eyes when we were each served a 12-inch pita bread with half a chicken inside!

Miracles

"In terms of sights and religious sites, I really liked Tiberias, where Jesus lived for three years, preaching and performing many of his miracles. And the boat ride on the Sea of Galilee was even better! We felt so close to God with the beauty surrounding us.

"But the most intense spiritual experience was on Mount Calvary. I saw the very spot where Jesus died for us, and I was deeply moved.

"It is now peaceful in the areas of the Holy Land that we visited. On TV, we see shots of unrest and violence, but what we experienced was strikingly different. I'm glad I went with the 'Filipinas' group of Viva Films on their shooting trip!"

(Journeys of Faith offers other Holy Land pilgrimages from Feb. 26 to Mar. 4, 2004, with pre-tours to Egypt and Jordan from Feb. 20, and optional post-tours to Rome, Assisi, Florence, Venice, Lourdes and Paris up to Mar. 17. It will also go on a "Holy Week in the Holy Land" pilgrimage from April 4 to 11. Call Rona at 0917 9099707 or Arlina at 0917 8148127, (02) 929-0144, 929-0155, or e-mail journeys@info.com.ph.)

Vocal charm marks new Midler album

By Rito P. Asilo

MIDLER. Takes the unnecessary sap off the schmaltz.

BETTE Midler may not have the exquisite vocal pipes of Barbra Streisand but, as one critic puts it, she can "carry a tune on personality alone."

Tribute

In her new album, "Bette Midler Sings the Rosemary Clooney Songbook" (Sony), the Divine Miss M pays tribute to the 1950s pop-jazz chanteuse (George's aunt), with a little help from producer/musical arranger Barry Manilow.

After more than 30 years, Midler reunites with Manilow, whom she affectionately calls "Manila," her accompanist when she was just starting to make a name for herself as a top cabaret performer in the '60s.

The chemistry of the duo is obvious and palpable, as their amusing verbal joust in the charming duet, "On A Slow Boat to China," can attest: She says, "Hey, nice piano-playing, Manila! Do you still play piano for people?" He answers, "Thank you, Miss M. Well, depends on who."

The result is a delightful aural mix of well-loved standards rendered with the Divine Miss M's characteristic frolicsome verve—which recalls the fun-filled energy and raw honesty of her "Beaches" (1989) and "For The Boys" (1991) soundtrack recordings.

Reworked classics

These slinky, reworked classics, particularly the beautiful "You'll Never Know," "Memories of You" and "Tenderly," benefit from Midler's loose, more freestyle approach to songs, as well as from Manilow's classy orchestral arrangements. The quality of Bette's alto takes the unnecessary sap off the schmaltz.

Midler's exuberant delivery perfectly matches tne feel-good vibe of "Mambo Italiano," a version better than any other cover we've heard of the Clooney classic.

Her playfulness also comes through in "Come On-A My House," and in her sizzling collaboration with Linda Ronstadt, "Sisters," whose two-part harmony is reminiscent of the Andrews Sisters' memorable harmonies like "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy."

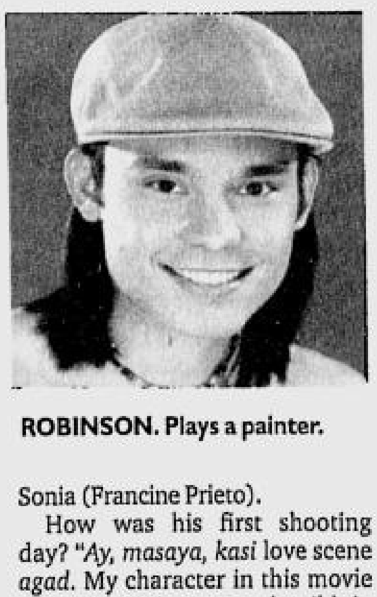
Lyrical subtexts

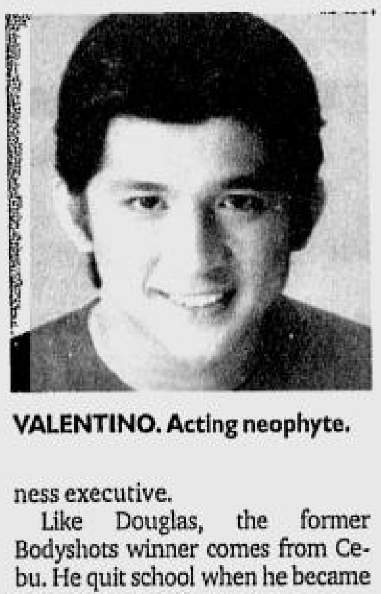
In other singers' hands, these songs could take a naughty spin, but trust the Divine Miss M to "re-arrange" lyrical subtexts from raunchy to merely playful.

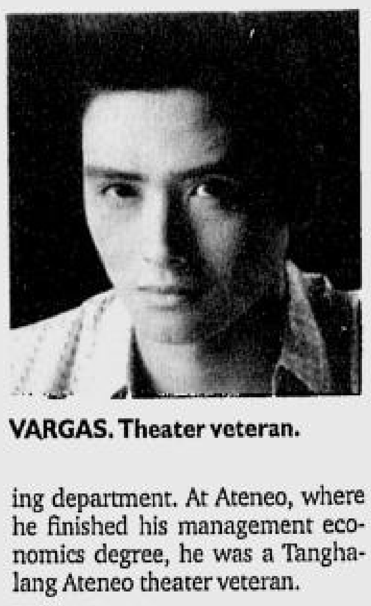
She adds a dash of jazz to the country favorite, "This Ole House," and wraps the 11-song set up with a raspy version of "White Christmas."

Three hunks introduced in 'Bridal Shower'

By Andy P. Bais


ROBINSON. Plays a painter.


VALENTINO. Acting neophyte.


VARGAS. Theater veteran.

THE JAN. 1 opening of "Bridal Shower," Seiko Films' entry to this year's Metro Manila Film Festival will give the production ample time to promote the movie, says the studio's big boss Robbie Tan.

The sex-comedy, Jeffrey Jeturian at the helm, is one of two filmfest entries given a Jan.1 play date. The other seven entries open on Dec. 25.

"But it doesn't mean that our film is inferior compared to the others. *Medyo* adult-oriented *kasi ito*," explains Robbie.

Statuesque

"Bridal Shower" features Dina Bonnevie, Cherrie Pie Picache and the statuesque, Francine Prieto. All three are now busy promoting the movie, along with Seiko's latest male recruits: Douglas Robinson, Juancho Valentino and Alfred Vargas.

Douglas is a ramp and commercial model from Cebu, and was a runner-up in last year's Mossimo Bikini Summit.

The 21-year-old nautical course graduate plays Bryan—a struggling painter who's one of the two men romantically involved with Sonia (Francine Prieto).

How was his first shooting day? "*Ay, masaya, kasi* love scene *agad*. My character in this movie is very passionate and wild in bed, *kaya ako gustong-gusto ni* Sonia," he beams.

Douglas prefers dramatic roles but he has no qualms about exposing his well-toned muscles.

Fashion show

Juancho, for his part, was discovered by Jeturian in a Bench fashion show. "Bridal Shower" is his first acting experience. He plays the other man in Sonia's life, a conservative but rich business executive.

Like Douglas, the former Bodyshots winner comes from Cebu. He quit school when he became busy with modeling assignments.

Confrontation scene

He confesses having had a hard time during his first day of shooting the movie: "*Mahirap, kasi* confrontation scene *agad* with Francine. *Di kasi ako marunong magalit*. But it helped that we had an acting workshop before we shot the movie. *Direk* Jeffrey was very patient with me."

Among the three hunks, Alfred is the most experienced in the acting department. At Ateneo, where he finished his management economics degree, he was a Tanghalang Ateneo theater veteran.

Romantic triangle

On TV, he formed a romantic triangle with Kristine Hermosa and Jericho Rosales in the Channel 2 soap, "Pangako Sa 'Yo."

In "Bridal Shower," he plays a macho dancer who shares comic scenes with Cherrie Pie. When told that he was to play the role, his initial reactions were shock and curiosity. But he eventually accepted the role because he's always wanted to challenge himself.

Mark Bautista is not just another popstar

By Mary Ann A. Bautista

BAUTISTA. Started singing when he was nine years old.

WHEN Mark Bautista joined the "Star For a Night" talent search, he wanted to win the contest and use it as a stepping stone to a singing career. As fate would have it, Sarah Geronimo won the talent search and Mark thought that was the end of his dream.

Contract

But Viva Records convinced the 20-year-old comer that he had what it took to be the next singing heartthrob, and signed him up to a management and recording contract.

Mark is nervous about his mall performances for his self-titled debut album. Although he has done several mall tours with Sarah Geronimo to promote their duet, "Broken Vow," which is included in Sarah's self-titled album, he isn't sure about his own drawing power.

Mark started singing when he was nine years old in his hometown, Cagayan de Oro. Later, he joined the school choir and sometimes sang at weddings. Before he joined a boy band in Cagayan, he performed in bars.

Three sets

"Even if I was only paid P150 for three sets. I was happy because I performed in front of a crowd. The best thing about being a performer is the meaning it gives to your music. When you sing for people, you satisfy them and yourself."

When a friend texted Mark to tell him that "Star for a Night" was holding auditions in Cebu, Mark took a chance and won. For the second round of auditions, Mark had to come to Manila, but he didn't have enough money for a plane trip. So, he boarded a cargo ship bound for Manila and made it to the auditions. That's how determined he was to attain his dream.

Self-conscious

Now that he's on his way to doing that, Mark can't describe how he feels when he hears his own voice on the radio. "I was happy and anxious when I first heard "Broken Vow," I was intimidated and felt self-conscious," Mark shares.

He has developed more confidence since then. He cites Martin Nievera and Frank Sinatra as his musical influences. Listening to his version of "Ngayon at Kailanman," "Baliw," and "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow," Mark sounds almost as good as Josh Groban.

MMFF entries feature gifted but underutilized actors

By Nestor U. Torre

PEREZ. Affecting and riveting performance in "Malikmata."

WE'RE glad that this year's Metro Manila Film Festival is showcasing some productions with huge casts, because they are fielding gifted actors we don't see enough of on the screen.

No surprise

For instance, "Filipinas" makes use of the talented Jose Mari Avellana as a corrupt politician. Mari is one of the best actors we have, which is no surprise since he's the son of *two* National Artists—director Lamberto V. Avellana for film, and thespic legend Daisy Hontiveros Avellana for theater.

People who've acted onstage with Mari say that the experience reminded them of the times when they shared the stage with the late, great Vic Silayan. (Incidentally, when will an arts organization nominate Vic for consideration as a National Artist in his own right?)

In "Crying Ladies," three of the standouts are Hilda Koronel, Ricky Davao and Shamaine Centenera Buencamino. Hilda hasn't been seen on the big screen for two years, but she makes up for lost time with her colorful characterization of one of the three ululating ladies in the movie's title.

As for Shamaine, she's a fine stage actress who's cast in "Crying Ladies" as Ricky's new wife, and comes up with a nuanced portrayal.

Estranged partner

Ricky has appeared in his share of films, but he's particularly vital here in the role of Sharon's estranged partner. By the way, he also comes on strong as a murder suspect in "Malikmata."

Speaking of "Malikmata," it showcases the textured performances of two actors we don't see enough of on the movie screen—Barbara Perez and Jerry O'Hara.

Barbara plays the murder victim. At first, she appears only in photographs, but a long flashback finally gives her an opportunity to act up a storm, as she fights off her attacker with all her might. The effect is both affecting and riveting.

For his part, Jerry makes a very different kind of police investigator. With his mop of white hair and intelligent eyes, he's the very antithesis of the character actors who usually play cops in local movies. This unconventional casting gives the film a fresh, unusual edge that makes the investigation more interesting and less predictable than it otherwise might have been.

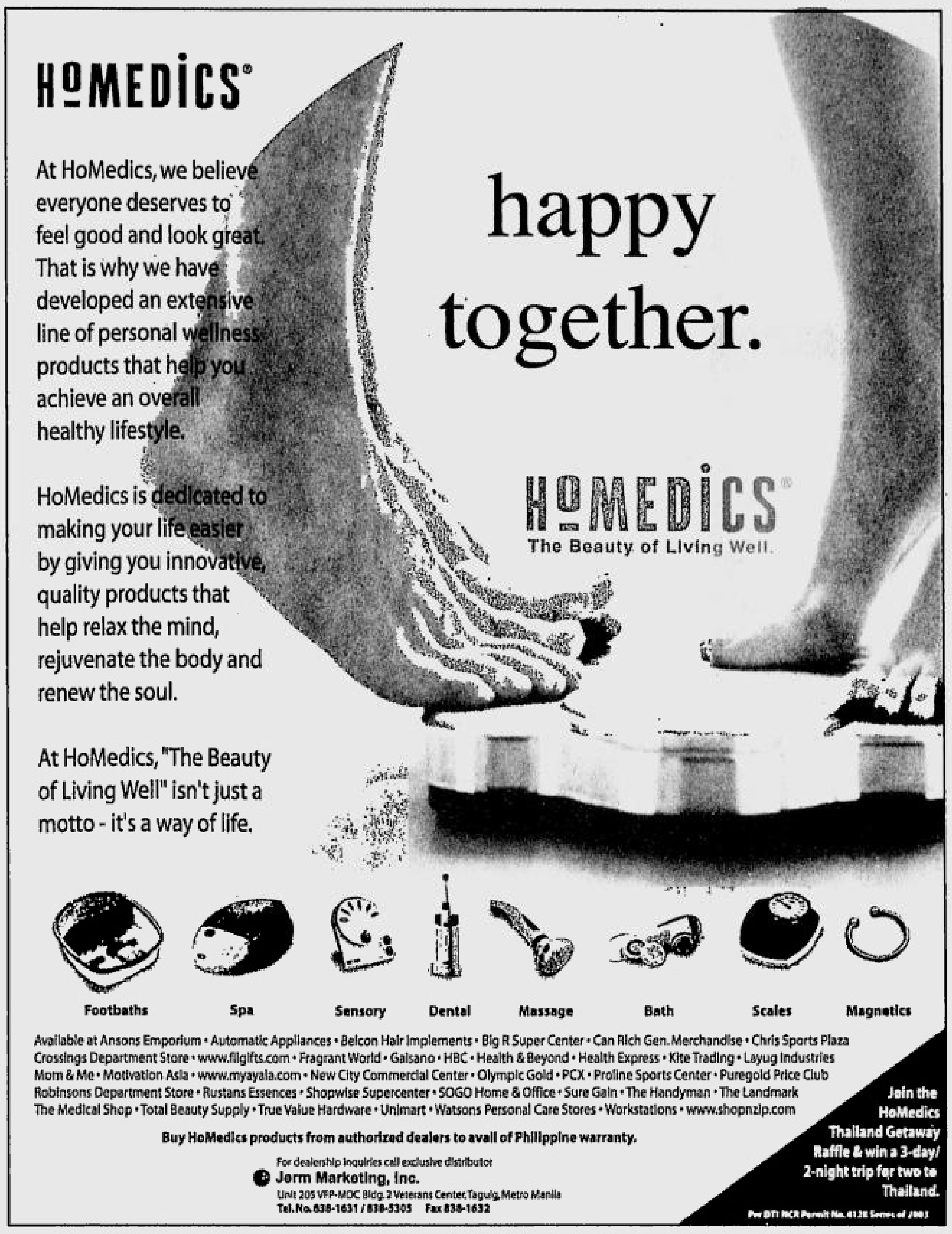
It's refreshing to see these and other seldom-seen actors on the big screen, which tends to showcase pretty much the same stellar talents in different combinations, from film to film.

Casting configuration

As more movies are made by new directors, the standard casting configuration changes, with talented theater actors being "rediscovered" for the film medium, or veteran performers being convinced to face the movie camera again.

We have many such overlooked talents just waiting to be remembered, and it's a tribute to new filmmakers' sense of movie history that they are giving these talented veterans another lease at filmic life.

In future, we hope to see the return to the big screen of other gifted but underutilized talents like Daria Ramirez, Rosa Rosal, Tommy Abuel, Mark Gil, Tita Muñoz, Nikki Ross, Mona Lisa, Niño Muhlach, Janice de Belen, Ward Luarca, Spanky Manikan, Amy Austria, Perla Bautista, Rosemarie Gil, Lollie Mara, Rio Locsin, Noni Buencamino, Matt Ranillo III, Romnick Sarmenta and Tetchie Agbayani. They still have a whole lot to give!



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'Balzac' vivifies emancipating power of great literature

By Rito P. Asilo

"BALZAC AND THE LITTLE CHINESE SEAMSTRESS." Strong narrative that touches with its muted introspection and unforced humor.

IN a provocative scene in Dai Sijie's semi-autobiographical French-Chinese co-production, "Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress," set in the early '70s, the 18-year-old female protagonist, a seamstress (the beautiful Zhou Xun) who remains nameless throughout the movie, writhes in pain and guilt as she ponders her fate while undergoing abortion.

Unplanned pregnancy

In her world, a woman is allowed to terminate unplanned pregnancy if she is married, but she can't marry until she turns 25.

Her dilemma is used as the thought-provoking backdrop for a story about two bourgeois city boys, Ma (Lui Ye) and Luo (Chen Kun), who have been sent to the mountains for re-education and "ideological realignment" during China's Cultural Revolution.

The boys are immersed in a world dominated by blind fanaticism and ignorance. For a few months, the duo's harsh "indoctrination" requires them to do hard labor, like carrying open containers of human waste on their backs up and down steep hills.

In this community, even Ma's violin and the music it produces come under suspicion—they have to convince illiterate leaders of the revolutionary peasants that the Mozart sonata Ma plays on his violin is a political mountain song titled "Mozart is thinking of Chairman Mao!"

Harsh conditions

Amidst these harsh conditions, the boys find their much-needed distraction when they meet—and fall in love with—the seamstress, the granddaughter of the village tailor. They teach her to read and appreciate the emancipating power of great literature, particularly Honore de Balzac's "Old Goriot." She soon begins to question her repressive world.

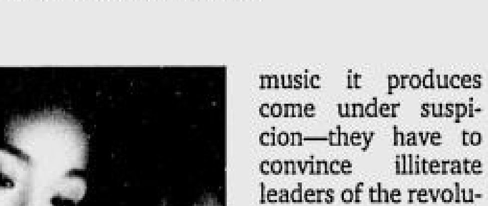
This bittersweet coming-of-age tale shows the heartbreaking consequences of finding the courage to look beyond a world of conformity.

It benefits from lush photography, an appropriately somber "20-years-later" epilogue, an attractive cast, and a strong narrative that touches with its muted introspection and unforced humor.

It reminds us that things that are worth fighting for in life sometimes require painful, life-changing sacrifices.

Home along the 'riles'—as it really is

By Noelani Torre



"RILES." About people with their own brand of nobility.

THE FIRST time we saw a film by Ditsi Carolino was in high school. The film was "Minsan Lang Sila Bata," and we've never forgotten it or its filmmaker. There we were, middle class and complacent, suddenly jolted from our comfortable perches by the harsh and poignant lives of child laborers caught by the soul-baring lens of Ditsi's and collaborator Nana Buxani's camera.

Awards

"Minsan Lang Sila Bata" went on to win several well-deserved awards, including the Gawad CCP Para sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video in 1996 and best documentary at the 15th Annual Film Academy of the Philippines Awards.

Following in the highly acclaimed footsteps of "Minsan" is Ditsi's newest documentary, "Riles: Life on the Tracks," a powerful record of the hand-to-mouth existence of a family living beside the railroad tracks—and practically on it, as the title implies. The film has already earned rave reviews abroad where it was first shown, and we are greatly pleased that we finally had the chance to see it last week.

Sponsored by the UK's National Film and Television School, "Riles" is the product of Ditsi's schooling at that institution. This means that the film, as she herself mentioned in a forum, was edited with a British audience in mind.

Grim realities

The subject matter is overwhelmingly Filipino, however, and the treatment is right for both foreign and local audiences, as we ourselves are too often divorced from the many grim realities of our own country.

The first shots of "Riles" are potent and unforgettable—a boy skating on the tracks, pushing a load of passengers; shacks huddled against each other; people eating, washing, playing cards on tables and chairs directly on the tracks; and then the oncoming train, noisy and lumbering, which sends them, hefting their furniture, scattering to the sides.

It is a sad sight, but strangely funny at the same time especially after the people get on with their interrupted activities as though nothing happened. It is this "life goes on" feeling that imbues the film's subjects with their own brand of nobility. *(To be concluded)*

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GAGAMBOY (MAQ Films)
CAPTAIN BARBEL (Premiere Films)
FANTASTIC MAN (Octo Arts Films)

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SM CITY PAMPANGA Amphitheater

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SM City PAMPANGA

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Free flowing G page J2

Ruffa's princess, Lorin Bektas page H1

Yes, yes, ho! Super's dream party page G2

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GETTIN' with Tim Yap
AUDREY Tatou on my mind

It's a Christmas wrap!

'TWAS the night before
Christmas,
And all through Manila,
Not a stoplight was working,
Which was really a killa.
Santa lost his way,
And found himself in the
ghetto,
Where a party was kickin',
With hotties in stilletos.
The bouncer said, "No,
You're not on the list,"
And Santa said "Yo,
you makin' me pissed."
Aubrey Miles stepped up,
And said, "He's with me."
The bouncer replies,
"Ganon po ba? Ay, sori..."
Behind the velvet ropes
the guests were all jammin'
From Rudolph to Vandolph
the whole room was
slammin'.
Only Super! can do this,
to throw a party this big.
All Santa could say
was "Hayop...astig!"
Whether you're naughty or
nice,
You need not feel slighted
With Super! this Christmas,
you are all invited.
Word.

KC makes a Super! point.
DANCE and pray
MEGA
PIOLO
GOOD boy na ako
BOY Troy
THE NEXT naked chef, Padma Lakshmi
CINDY Kurleto learns to fly
VIVA Colombia! Gabriel Garcia Marquez
LEX bomb, Lex bomb, Super! SWAK! it
PIA Guanio, wind-blown effect
UHM ... Hi, I'm Bea Alonzo ... uhm
I'M with Santa
I'M still, I'm still Queen Rania from the block
HEY Mr. DJ ... can I make a request? New York's hippest Mark Ronson
MY
JULES' jewel
WITH a bang and a wink, Martin Valdes gets the girls
JULIUS Cesar on his throne
MAG ocho-ocho na!
TAYLOR-MADE I swear they're real
KATYA later baby!

Well, are you?

Age against the machine

Gino de la Paz

While most people look upon Christmas as a bloodbath for one's bank account, I pivot myself towards the more introspective—and sometimes outrageous—aspects of the season

ARE you for surreal?

If I could splice my most cherished Christmas images into one tight montage, I think I'd come up with something pleasantly distinctive. Set to "Champagne Supernova" by Oasis, the opening scene's shooting script would look something like this:

Fade in:

Ext. Charlebois Drive NW—establishing shot

The mercury is parked at a not-bad -2°C and the snow is a bit slushy. The Northern Lights, aka the Aurora Borealis, turn in quite a performance and the Canadian skies are candy-flipping. It's a Magritte painting through the eyes of Danny Boyle.

Smash cut—tracking shot

Designer denim jacket over a hoodie with conspicuous ranch dressing stains. Gino walks home, sauced up by penny highballs and noshing on a pizza. He thinks that life, like Radiohead, is good.

POV

Jack Frost fogs up his contacts so something on the pavement appears slightly off-focus. A Jetta cruises by and the object hurtles away, exiting stage left.

Gino (dropping pizza to rub eyes)

Dude, that's the biggest [expletive] rabbit I've ever seen!

MICHAEL Jackson is my friend!

Smash cut—extreme close up

Pat, a close buddy, is wise like Zeus, but of German-Ukrainian stock. He also looks a bit like Eric Foreman from "That '70s Show."

Pat (smacking Gino on the head)

Bugs Bunny can't leap over oncoming traffic, you [expletive] dumbass! That was a [expletive] deer!

Wide shot

Camera pans to the light show above, just as Noel Gallagher gnarls: "Someday you will find me / Caught beneath the landslide / In a champagne supernova in the sky…"

Dissolve to stock shot of Macaulay Culkin with mouth agape in "Home Alone"

Fade out

While most people look upon Christmas as a bloodbath for one's bank account, I pivot myself towards the more introspective—and sometimes outrageous—aspects of the season. Okay, the cash and gifts I receive from Santa help amp my spirits, but I get the most juice from international moments of Zen that I've experienced during past holidays.

Human Swiss knife

(Cue in Overture from Georges Bizet's "Carmen")

To bankroll my Boxing Day spree and a trip to Montreal, I was a human Swiss knife this same time last year. Working in the morning and attending classes in the afternoon, I still managed to shoehorn some time to volunteer for Unicef after 5 p.m. and help save the world's neediest children. It was my first time ever to wrap gifts professionally, so I was pumped. However, I had no clue that I was in for more than papercuts.

I slipped in a fleece vest that I had expertly wrapped back into the Old Navy bag in which it came. Afterwards, I proudly handed it to the man with the claim stub but to my shock, he was disgruntled. Someone needed a Valium and it sure wasn't me.

"Why did you put it back in the bag? Now my wife knows exactly where I bought her present!" Disgruntled Man barked, pounding his fist on the counter. He was very angsty, very Limp Bizkit.

In my best Dawson Leary impression, I mumbled the following speech in my head: "It's not my fault you nickel-and-dimed your wife's present, you bastard!" But even if I wanted so badly to rebut, I smiled back and said, "Season's Greetings from Unicef!" Gandhi, I really hope you're reading this.

A challenge for Hallmark

People all over the world,
Join hands,
Start a love train, love train
"Love Train," The O'Jays [Theme from Gap "Stripes" Ad, Winter 2002]

From BC to the Maritimes, the ethnic diversity of Canada makes greeting each other during the holidays somewhat tricky. How do you pack "Merry Christmas," "Happy Hanukkah," and "Crazy Kwanzaa" into one crisp salutation? Simple: "Aloha!"

My friends and I took on the challenge of mounting an all-encompassing religious feast by gathering inspiration from the basest TV series in syndication today, "Baywatch Hawaii." Stockpiling all the faux-Polynesian dollar store décor we could find, our "Let's Get Lei'd" party took place at Lanchani's house, which was also where several Buddhist monks were crashing that night. If the United States is a melting pot, then Canada is a mosaic; it was crazy to see young people of all cultural backgrounds gather in one place for a multi-denominational celebration. Once again, it proved that college kids, regardless of creed or color, enjoyed drinking till they passed out.

Who are you,
Who who, who who?
"Who Are you?" The Who [Theme from "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation"]

On the other hand, December's red-letter day is less complex in Colombia; you can say "Feliz Navidad!" without upsetting other humans. Beyond that, I experienced another type of holiday salutation. A day after cooking up a fiesta with some other Christmas orphans, my Quebecois friend Audrey and I decided to stop by for drinks at Open, a trendy neighborhood bar. They should've named it Closed, since the sight that greeted us that night was straight out of Jerry Bruckheimer's head. Instead of bouncers, police officers guarded the premises from a growing crowd of disoriented beautiful people. I rubbernecked my way closer to the crime scene, which I mistakenly brushed off as a garden-variety drug bust. It was apparently a shootout and the dead guy chillaxing in the middle of it all was the bullseye. Seeing something that nasty, especially during Christmastime, shook me from the gut-level up. To stop that picture from spooling endlessly in my cranium, I drove around stoned in Santa Marta. That dude may have circled the drain, but my most favorite time of the year wasn't about to go down the same crapshoot.

Viva lost wages

Fade in:

Int. A mall near you—establishing shot

It's the last shopping weekend before Christmas. Despite the blistering heat, some shoppers sport garments that resemble Fair Isle sweaters. The polar ice caps must finally be melting.

Smash cut—tracking shot—dissolve to POV

Typical Filipina chick. Fake Murakami bag from Greenhills. Unquestionably on Friendster.

Typical chick (shouting into a Nokia 7650)

I can't get there by 4:30; it's so traffic!

Smash cut—close up

Gino squints as he scratches his bedhead.

Split screen—stock shot of Scooby Doo

Scooby Doo does exactly the same and appears on the right side of the screen.

Voice over

Gino

I was never taught to use the word "traffic" as an adjective so this is original. I'd better shoot a quick e-mail to my friends at Super! and tell them about this new trend.

Smash cut—close up of computer screen

Doogie Howser, MD rip-off, including late '80s word processor.

Cue in Doogie theme music

Off cam voice over

Gino / talking computer screen (12-point Courier New)

Yo Super!

Winter in Manila rocks! I feel kinda out of place, though, with my summer clothes. Am I the only one who thinks 23°C is crazy warm? It's tough! Please remind me to bring my North Face stuff and Ugg boots so that I won't stick out so much next time. Thanks!

Have you noticed? The malls are packed with like three million shoppers! It was like China, but without the bicycles and that rotten fruit smell. I must say, the security here is understandably tight, but I think they should also brush the lint off our clothes when they frisk us for concealed weapons, love handles, or whatever it is they think we'd duct tape to our torsos when we go for Moroccan mint lattes. It would be like a human carwash! Sweet!

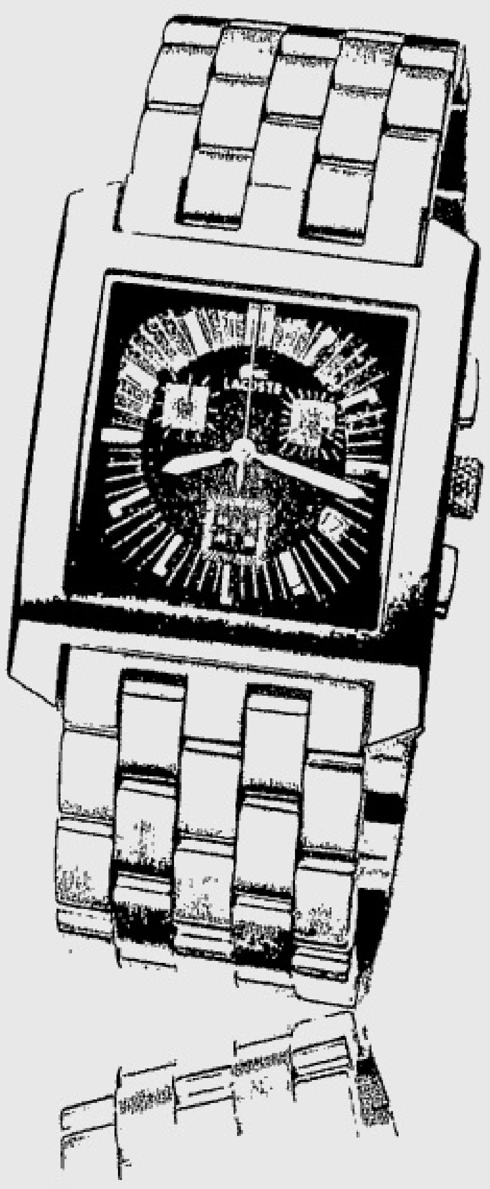
Anyway, I heard this chick use the word "traffic" as an adjective, like we say "awesome," "cool," and "great." Do you think she's on to something? Do you also think "Sir-ma'am" or "Ma'amsir" is the new "Dude"? I hear it everywhere so I can't help but think this is the future of hipspeak. We should probably make that the theme of our next issue!

But back to the holidays. I'm really having a blast here since it's my first time in years to spend Christmas in Manila. Apart from the bazaars that sprouted up like the shawarma stalls of the '90s, there are tons more that I want to explore. I've never been to Boracay—not even to Quiapo—so I'm positive I'll have more raw material for future holiday flashbacks. Insane, don't you think? Have a Super Christmas!

ttyl,
Gino

Fade out

End credits



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SATURDAY

Hail, the little princess

By Tim Yap

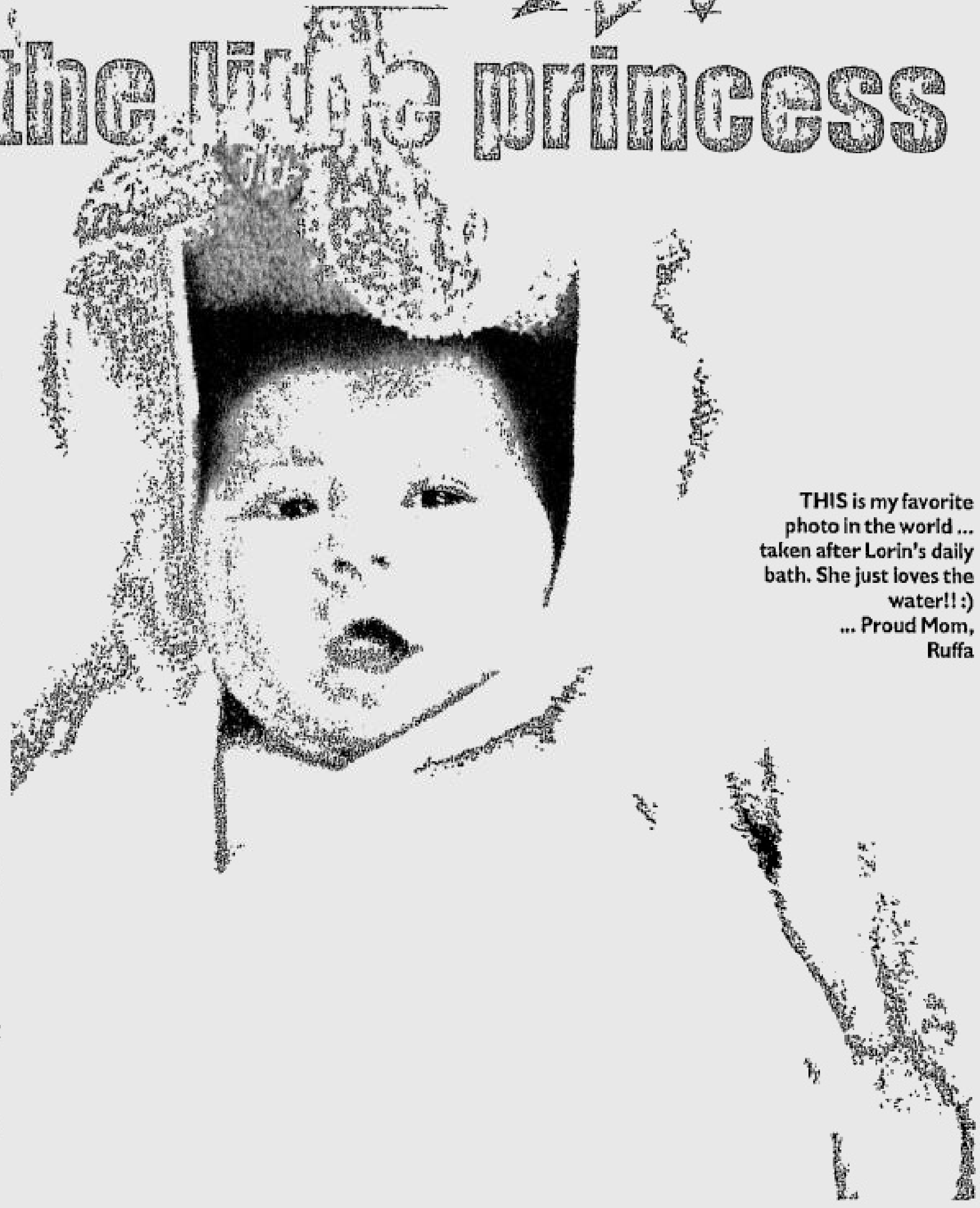
LOURDES Ciccone Leone aka mini Madonna is no longer alone. Lorin Gabriela Guttierez Bektas, mini Miss World and bundle of joy of forever controversial Ruffa and Yilmaz, is here!

Born on a sunny summer day, Aug. 3, at the Cedar Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles at 7:04 a.m., she was a robust seven-pound, eight-ounce, 18-inch bundle. A stunner like momma.

Her dedication (not baptism, because her parents are Muslim) happens tomorrow at The Loft, Rockwell Center, with The Brides Maids and Co. at the helm of festivities.

And boy, what festivities they are! First, she has a stellar list of godparents that includes Richard and Lucy, Aga and Charlene, Ate Vi and Boyet, Ricky Lo, Tita Charo Santos, Gary V and Tessa PV!

All in all, there are 22 pairs of *ninongs* and *ninangs* to bring good tidings and maybe more Gucci shoes—just like those that mom Ruffa received during the baby shower before the little princess was born.



THIS is my favorite photo in the world ... taken after Lorin's daily bath. She just loves the water!! :)
... Proud Mom,
Ruffa

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P59
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Sweet n' Sour Pork with Siomai, Rice

P69
HEN LIN MAMI DIMSUM HOUSE
Chicken Mami
LYDIA'S LECHON
Choose any 1 viand

P79
BODHI
1 Barbecue, 2 Viands, Plain Rice
Sandy's Cuisine
Adobong Tostado, Garlic Rice and Soup

P89
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Choose any 2 Viands with Rice and Pancit Canton
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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
SATURDAY

MANHATTAN
Columbus Circle
Times Sq
GREAT AMERICAN MUSIC
SHO
Chamb
World

For the lonely, for those in love

Text by Martin Valdes
Photos by Ronnie Salvacion
Makeup by Juan Sarte III
Styling by Chechel Joson
Fashion by F and H by Folded & Hung

that's one of the li

LOVE is a union of people oft separated by circumstance but joined by mutual experience and emotion.

It is a time-tested fuel that warms the hearth of human evolution. It is the basis of religion, the inspiration behind art, the backbone of all civilized notions and the cause celebre of humanity. Bereft of love, action is mechanical and reaction is fruitless, poems are just words that rhyme, nature is boring, and God is dead. What use is imagination if concocted without love? What use has excellence if not tempered with love? Why breathe at all?

We are creatures of dust and clay who achieve divinity in the temporal moments we are in love. With the world reeling from the effects of its own folly, and the nation coping with the havoc wrought by its vices, the citizens of Planet Life have been searching for the ultimate panacea. Seeking miracles and answers, we forage through the dramatic and tangled jungles of government and organized religion. To augment our perspectives, we build fantastic machines and Babel Towers made of steel. We look for love in the wrong places. We often fail to notice two people sitting on a park bench holding hands.

Love is a union of people oft separated. On occasion, those two hands have to let go. There is nothing more painful than the separation of people who have found each other. It is hard enough to find anyone, to start with. In a world of seven billion humans connected by a maximum of six degrees, singling out just one person to possess, and who can possess us, is quite a challenge, indeed. So when that elusive accident occurs at last, it is only natural that we hold it to our chest, clasp it tightly with two miserly hands, and hope that love remains within the radius of an extended arm.

But life is a turbulent river, too. On many occasions, it is when we find an ideal match that fate strikes with the cruelest irony of separation. For school, for work, for family, for whatever reason—numerous couples have had to deal with heretofore indulgent proximity suddenly turning on its heels. The circumstances, though fair and practical, always feel unfair and impractical. There is the cost of maintaining a long-distance relationship, the unsettling suspiciousness borne of ignorance, and the devastating absence of the one person in this whole wide world who can make you smile without trying.

Love is a union.

We persist, of course. As foolish and ill-fated as it may seem, our romantic sentiment demands that we attempt to accommodate this set-back, and assimilate it into the history of our mutual experience. This is a test, we reason against reason, to see if our relationship can withstand the duress of distance and the rigors of time. If we get through this, we shall be a stronger unit. Our story shall become a template for all couples, a legend to attest to the strength of love, unconquered by physical expanse or petty emotion. After all, whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger, right? None of these adages make us feel any better, or alleviate the yearning, or lessen the pain. But we persist.

The holidays are of particular strain to those who are apart. The season almost requires affection, and when this ingredient is missing, the recipes this Christmas will lack distinct flavor. But should we capitulate to the cold logic of geography, should we surrender the ideal for a more convenient situation, should we settle for what is practical over what is sentimental? I think not. The fortunate few who have found love know that this is worth fighting for. The continents are but shallow walls that can be scaled through perseverance, and months are slow steps which lead to the eventual reunion. The world is a smaller place for those in love. All problems will be solved, all doubts shall be assuaged, and all the questions this mad world of infinite permutation can be satisfied by a single, simple answer.

Love.

E-mail the author at lasengnomad@yahoo.com

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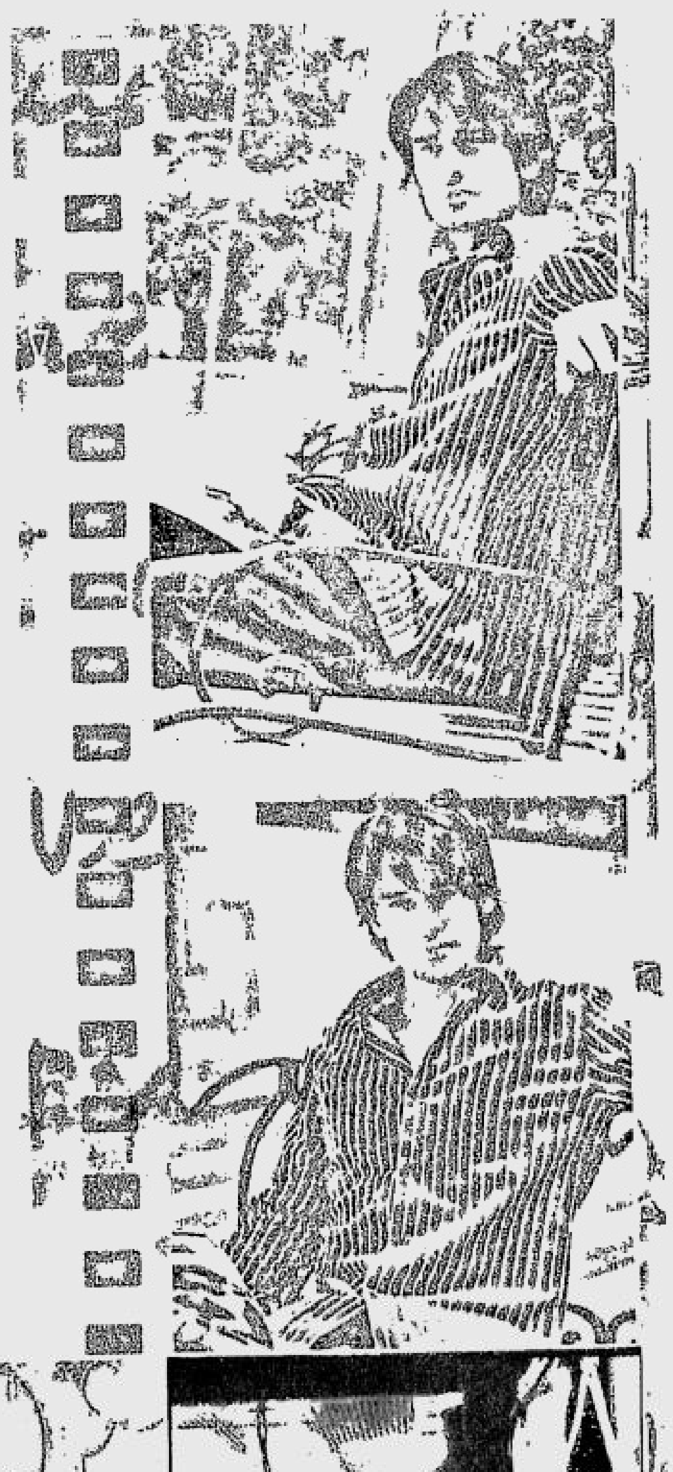
Of you



We are family!

BARRIO Fiesta. *Kain na po ...*

MANA ko po ...

By Lino Cayetano
Contributor

HONG Kong has fast-paced and highly stylized films. Hollywood has big-budget action blockbusters.

Certain genres define cinema for a particular place and time, and if there is one type of movie that defines Philippine cinema more than any other, it is the family epic melodrama.

Films that revolve around the family have always been favored by both Filipino viewers and filmmakers. Though Philippine cinema has ventured out and incarnated in many forms—from bold or TF, to fantasy, comedy, horror and action—local movies have consistently kept that element of family drama.

Should they be strictly categorized into genres, most our films would be hyphenated and attached to the word "family." For example, "action oriented-family drama" or "family-comedy-drama." No matter what the movie is about, a dimension of drama in the family is always injected as a part of the plot or conflict.

Cultural

This predilection has deep cultural and psychological reasons. It is no secret that the family is treasured, admired and protected in our society, and so our cinema necessarily reflects that. In much the same way, we can say that Hollywood's high-budget action films are a reflection of America's gung-ho attitude and how the powerful nation thinks nothing of flexing its military and economic muscle anywhere in the world that it chooses. Likewise, the fast-paced, highly individualistic lifestyle of the Hong Kong Chinese is manifest in the territory's movies. In contrast, Philippine cinema invariably examines the individual within the context of his or her family.

Within itself, in light of the changing times and changing interests, the family film has also evolved. From the early 1950s up till a few years ago, conflict in family films consisted of such situations as city versus province, rich versus poor, illegitimate children, and disputes over land or inheritance. And though these themes are still present, other elements have emerged and become popular, brought about by the changes in Filipino family life.

As shown in many recent films, urbanization has had a strong effect on Filipino family life. Deeply rooted rural values have given way to the belief and value systems of the urbanized family. New ideas, trends, and attitudes on a wide array of areas, from fashion to sex to political doctrines from the west, have also wedged wider gaps between generations. As a result, it has become more and more difficult to reconcile traditional Filipino family values with reality. Traditions have been stretched, values compromised, core beliefs twisted.

> People ask why Filipino films keep going back to the domestic drama. This is because we look for stories that tell us how we are

Powerful

Film and television becomes a powerful tool when the changes affect the very mindset of the Filipino and we begin to long for the old value system that we were born into. Despite the vastness of our country, we share core beliefs and values when it comes to family life: respect elders, take care of the young, to name only two. Interest in film and television is generated because real family conflicts sustain the narrative flow of the renditions on film. Mostly, these are problems that arise from misunderstanding and unfulfilled expectations. This is a unique quality of our culture and movies, but something that we share with some of our Southeast Asian neighbors like China, Taiwan, and Korea.

A lot of people ask why Filipino films keep going back to the family drama. The answer lies in a simple examination of our society, and what the Filipino is looking for. We can scrutinize the technical aspects—directing, acting, cinematography—but in the end, the Filipino will be looking for stories that tell us who we are. These films may not fill the void in our lives, but they can surely give expression to our feelings and sentiments.

There comes a point when we should stop looking to Hollywood and other foreign films as blueprints for what cinema should be, and realize that we have our own unique kind. Therefore, we have to examine and experience it for what it is.

Straight . . .

From page H4

have learned the most things.

For one, I am a believer that we are a hard-working and honest race. My experience in business, especially as an employer, has been very fulfilling. Many people say that Filipinos are plagued with colonial mentality, which has held us back from progress. I find that it really only takes listening to what people have to say and treating them well to inspire them.

Text message

I got a text message the other day that said: "Breaking news! Pumayag na c Roco na maging VP ni FPJ ... Mabuhay c Bembol!"

It never ceases to amaze me how everyone in this country can laugh their way through adversity. As the mechanic in the province said, we make the country. So when you find yourself about to talk shit about the Philippines, especially with foreigners, think twice. This is our only country; we should love it and speak well of it. If we don't stand up for it, than who will?

For comments e-mail the author at swak@info.com.ph

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Hon, *akala ko nagpa re-bond ka?*

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Brave new brides

By Jenina F. Alli

A SEX comedy directed by the award-winning Jerry Jeturian (of "Pila Balde" and "Tuhog" fame), "Bridal Shower" (which premieres Jan. 1) is about three female friends on the time-immemorial quest for Mr. Right.

These three friends who work in an ad agency—Tates (Dina Bonnevie), Katie (Cherrie Pie Picache), and Sonia (Francine Prieto)—come home to different lovelife-related dilemmas. Tates, despite her badge of independence, goes through harrying lengths to get her married boyfriend (Christian Vasquez) to marry her. Sonia, after canoodling with her Ayala Alabang-bred preppy guy (Juancho Valentino, Body Shots winner), goes on to play bedroom hooky with her struggling artist of a paramour (Douglas Robinson, Mossimo Bikini Summit 2001 runner-up). Finding herself pregnant, she becomes bride of necessity and gets caught in eeny-meeny-miny-moing between Mr. Wonderful and Mr. Masarap. Meanwhile, weight-battling Katie (Picache wears a fat suit through most of the movie) argues the case of girlfriend versus sugar mommy when her affections are rapidly and passionately returned by the macho dancer (Alfred Vargas of ABS-CBN Talent Center) she and Tates hired for Sonia's bridal shower.

It's rather difficult to consign the film to simple categories like "bad," "okay," or "good." Think of it as a Baguio *ukay-ukay* fest: you've got choice picks strewn in with pure drab. Be that as it may, you still make your annual shopping trip up North. Which is to say that despite several points of suck-age, there are enough gems in "Bridal Shower" to merit your time and money.

The film starts with a strong strong rev. The first half employs cut-to-cut editing, with Ally McBeal-esque mosh shots as mechanism for either flashbacks, metaphors, or conjectures. Musical scoring is right on the dot, and character establishment is first done through consecutive shots of them reaching orgasm, after which the past story of each lead unfolds. Some curtain-opener, right?

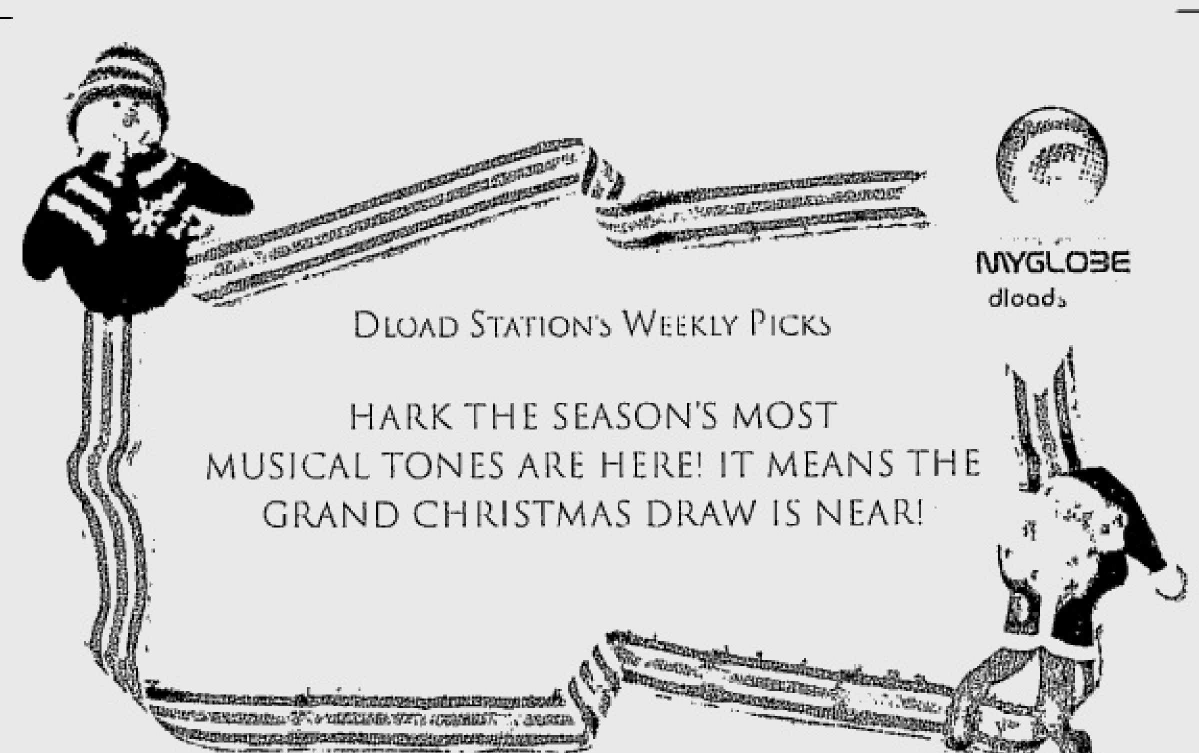
And then the momentum ebbs, only to be picked up again by sharp and quick humorous exchanges, especially between Tates, Katie, and Sonia, that have you bent over, and slapping your knee. Dina Bonnevie, vampy goddess and all, dishes out a brand of physical comedy that delivers the punch sans the slip-on-a-banana-peel school of slapstick. There are bouts of brilliant dialogue, but the storytelling itself falls a few paces short of the blue-ribbon line. Good scenes are served with superfluous ones equivalent to conversational dead air. In short, moments of "Hahaha!" and "Isn't this gonna end already???" take sporadic turns.

This movie heralds the renaissance of the Pinoy sex comedy, with make-out scenes that, aside from being vital to the story, will make you choke on your drink mid-laugh

Among the three, Katie's story arc is the tightest. Cherry Pie gives another stellar performance. Watch for the cake scene and the finale which, as a friend put it, is most likely where the bulk of Ms Picache's talent fee went to. Katie's character goes full-circle and her plotline winds up with a flourish.

The story arcs of Tates and Sonia, on the other hand, suffer loosely from what I call "The Epoxy Ending." Conflict gets fixed, not resolved. No epiphanies, no palpable self-actualization. The entire film runs through the maze of struggles and problems and then—poof!—no more maze! Of course one can't discount the possibility of this being deliberate. Sometimes the point of a story is to show how a character journeys through, around, and under, but never out of, Point A. However—you know that cliché about making lemonade when life hands you lemons?—in Tates' denouement, it is as if a spankin' new industrial juicer fell out of the sky, right on her doorstep.

Still, "Bridal Shower," as far as direction and writing are concerned, heralds the renaissance of the Pinoy sex comedy where pumping scenes, aside from being vital to the story, will make you choke on your drink mid-laugh. Most important, it makes no false attempts to revolve around protagonists that are anything but real. The Filipina isn't always the pastel-wearing Juliet who keeps her virginity till the end of the movie even after the illicit out-of-town trip with her amore and scenes of *habulan* on the beach. Sometimes, the Filipina is the kooky, high-powered corporate chick who enjoys good conversation, nice coffee, and a mean O. Learn it, live it, and love it!



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'tis the season to make great things possible Globe

Straight 'promdi' heart

SWAK!

by Lex

THE NOISE and traffic that inevitably accompanies the Christmas season always leaves me claustrophobic and short of breath. That's why I consider myself very lucky that once a week work takes me to the province, where I can get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. I look forward to putting on my *tsinelas* and breathing fresh, country air, and sharing some beer with sugar farmers.

Provincial wisdom

I've found that the best way to break the ice with the field workers is to talk either show biz or politics. This is the secret language that all Pinoys can speak. "*Sino ba ang mas sikat dito, ang* Sex Bomb Dancers *o ang* Gee Girls?" Their eyes light up. "*Ay Ser, wala ang mga iyan, ang mainit talaga dito si* Maui Taylor..." and before you know it they're discussing their life philosophies and dreams for their children.

The atmosphere in the province is really different from Manila. I find that there is fewer pretension all around, and the world is not on constant caffeine overdrive. It is in this alternative universe that I find so much wisdom.

Just last week I was talking to an 80-year-old man in a shirt that was weathered with age but immaculately ironed. He had worked for 50 years as a mechanic but he was also a voracious reader, and had thousands of stories to tell.

...my native land. If I don't stand up for it, who will?

"*Alam mo hijo*, during the war we never thought it would end. During martial law it was the same thing. And now it looks like FPJ is going to win and everyone is acting like it's the end of the world again. But you know, at the end of the day, it isn't the government that makes a country. It is you."

These little bursts of knowledge from a stranger remind me how lucky I am to be Filipino, living in what is undoubtedly a beautiful country. People always think that you have to have studied to be smart. I find the opposite to be true. It is in the company of fishball vendors and carpenters that I

STRAIGHT: H3

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQU R
SATUR Super S

Music, MTV. . .

...and love for all mankind

Tim Yap

VJ TRIO. I love KC, Carlo and Sarah

IT WAS prom night for pop music lovers—Dish was "tickled pink" with balloons and cotton candy-coated curtains lined its halls. But instead of **Danny Zuko** and **Sandy Olssen**, VJs **KC Montero** and **Sarah Meier** played host to a love feast that was to launch the MTV Asia Awards 2004.

Yup, you got that right. The event, the only pan-regional event of its kind in Asia, happens this coming Valentine's Day, 2004. Which explains the "love" theme for the pre-event: "Like music, it knows no boundaries." Come to think of it, love seems to be part of everyone's campaign—"Love ko 'to," "Love ko Bench," and whaddaya know, "I love MTV!"

To take it further, kissing booths, tarot tents and marriage corners were set up while Barbie's Cradle, Parokya ni Edgar and Rivermaya—the key ingredients for a night of aural aphrodisiacs—played up to the crowd of music-popping scenesters. And why not? It was a voting party, with all the abovementioned artists vying for "Favorite Artist-Philippines" in the awards proper. A prelude to the national elections? Well, let's hope May 2004 turns out to be as musical and fun as this one.

The voting party was part of an exciting eight-leg prelude leading to the final vote count for winners which takes place next year. But as early as now, music addicts can pledge their "love" via www.mtvasiaawards.com, which gives them a chance to win a Toyota Vios and HP products, among other cool gear.

I spotted Rivermaya's **Rico Blanco**, who confessed to me that his love was still somewhere in Europe (can't say where, it's a dead giveaway). I also noticed his resemblance to **Jerry Yan**, but I chose not to tell him. Right behind us, twosomes and threesomes filed up to the kissing platform to take advantage of a free-for-all smooching session. Talk about

MUSIC/12

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MTV BABES. Tonz Hino and Chris Lopez at Dish

GLITTER GALS. Anne Matoto and Sigrid Villamil

ADDICTED TO LOVE. Paolo Trillo and Emma Policarpio

SWATCH BUDDIES. Sarah Meier, back from NYC with best buddy Charisse

ON-CAM, OFF-CAM. Jean Rodriguez and Francis Andaya

BE SEEN 24/7. Bea Constantino and JR Isaac

Music, MTV . . .

...and love for all mankind

From page I1

PDA. Then again, eye candy is eye candy. I'm not complaining.

Michelle Branch and Dido

This early, our favorite music station announced that Dido, one of the nominees for Favorite Female Category, will be performing at the awards proper to be held in Singapore. Michelle Branch, another nominee, dropped by Hong Kong to show her support at the event's press conference.

I've been fortunate to have attended the awards faithfully since its birth in Asia a couple of years back, and I can say that every year, it gets better. Who can forget **Mandy Moore**'s duet with **Regine Velasquez**? Or our local VJ **Belinda Panelo** interviewing **Ronan Keating**? And **Sarah Meier** with **Pink** at the after-party?

Donatella Versace walked past me when she accepted her "Style Award" (she looked like a sunburnt Barbie—on steroids), and I was right beside **Robbie Williams** in the toilet when we answered nature's call (hey, no George Michael jokes, please). And I even met F4—all of them, together—but nobody knew them at the time, so I just politely shook their hands, practiced my Mandarin for five minutes, and headed towards **Avril Lavigne**'s direction.

I remember our very own **Gary Valenciano** getting star-struck over **Zhang Ziyi**, how the Singaporeans loved **Donita**, and how all the canto pop stars looked like they were my siblings.

But more than the music marketing and celebrity surfing, what makes the MTV Asia Awards really special is its ability to make Asia smaller, binding us with our common love for music.

That alone is enough to make me say it again: "I love MTV!"

DAO shall listen to Rivermaya, says Rico Blanco

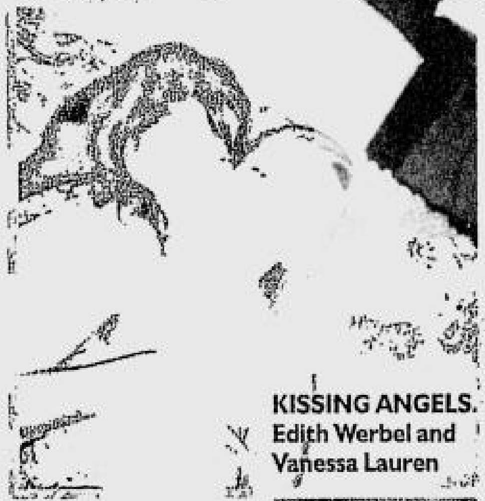
STYLISH GENES. Audrey Carpio and Ines Cabarrus

RATED Rico

YES YES SHOWDOWN. Chito Miranda and Vinci Montaner rock the mike during the MTV Awards voting party

BUBBLEBOY GETS LUCKY. Alex Escat, Ipe Cruz and Steph Zubiri under the mistletoe

SWITCHING SALIVA. Best buddies Kara Tolentino and Miguel Rosales, who's responsible for the night's decor



KISSING ANGELS. Edith Werbel and Vanessa Lauren

HEAVENLY FEEL. Tonz Hino, Rod Nepomuceno and Chris Lopez

I VANT YOUR BLOOD. Paolo Paraiso with hot date Mylene Dizon

SUPER MARIO AND HIS BROTHER. Kevin Vicente and Mario Luis toast to it

PINK PROM. Why don't you give love on Christmas day

PAROCHIAL MUSIC MAKERS. Vinci, Buwi and Gabby of Parokya ni Edgar, nominees for MTV Asia Awards Favorite Artist Philippines

STUD FARM. Ricardo Garcia and Matt Lim

RIVERMAYA flowing

PINK PAIR. Rajo Laurel and Paula Nocon

MYLENE Dizon's bro Anthony

MODEL COUPLE. Michelle and Trey chilling out

STYLISTICS. Emman and Golda—fresh, new talent

CHIKKA ADDICTS. Dennis Mendiola and Louie Ang

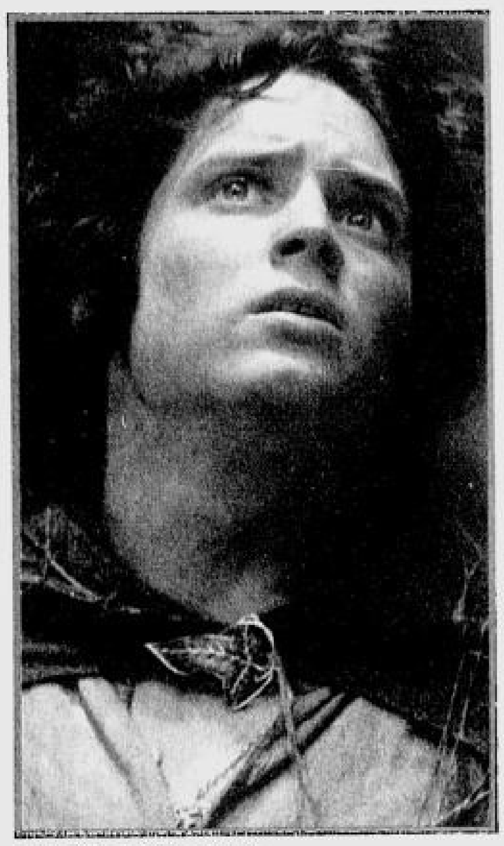
BOY TOYS. Anton del Rosario and Evan Santos

GOLD STANDARD. My gym mate Luis

A DOSE OF C. Charlie Bautista

AVANT GUARDIAN. Ivarluski Aseron

AND TXT AND TXT AND TXT AND TXT AND TXT AND



HARD hobbit to break

WATCH!

Gandalf couldn't have put it better when he said, "It's the deep breath before the plunge." True enough, "Lord of the Rings—The Return of the King" surpasses the hype that went with its two predecessors.

Yeah, Elijah Wood displays the same facial calisthenics as Robert De Niro's ... butt. He's truly one hard hobbit to break. It's hard to stop heckling about a possible romantic liaison between Dopey and Sneezy. As with males and females shrieking over the sight of pasty white Legolas (or as someone in the audience puts it—Lego-lust and Ara-horny.)

If you don't want to know what happens next, stop reading.

I cried hardest when Gollum died. I wanted to scream, "My preciooouuuuuuusssss!" When a computer-generated character displays a wider range of emotion than the bearer of the rings, then either technology has advanced beyond our wildest dreams (Gentxt was the night's sponsor), or I really miss Rene Requiestas.

In the end, the humans win, the hobbits marry and Aragorn, feeling Bush-y, said, "This day does not belong to one man ... but to all, to welcome the days of peace..." Poor Saddam.

Tim Yap

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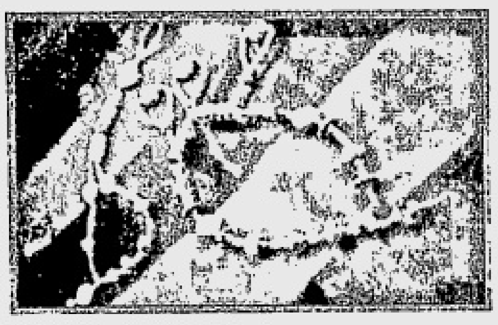

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SPIRIT fingers

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Shine!

"The light of the remotest stars comes last to men; and until it has arrived, man denies that there are stars there."—Friedrich Nietzsche

OUT THE WINDOW

Tals Diaz

I AM exhausted.

What I mean is that I'm tired of people talking about the crass commercialization of Christmas, the stressful shopping for the holidays, and the endless arguments on the morality of recycling gifts. For amidst the holi-dazed and confused fracas of the season, I also think people get hit with a collective case of amnesia. I still believe that 'tis the season not only to be joyful, but also *mindful* of what this magical day is really about. I'm not going to preach and pontificate, because I know that would just fly in and out of ears like an overplayed pop song on FM radio. So I'll try something different.

My one wish this season is to give everyone a little gift of my own: a Pulp Fiction-esque Christmas story. (And here's hoping one day Quentin Tarantino reads it and sends me an e-mail sometime.)

> My one wish this season is to give everyone a little gift of my own: a Pulp Fiction-esque Christmas story

Here's a little story about the stars. Enjoy!

STARSTRUCK

Star search

The legend among the stars went like this: there was to rise a great Astronomer on Earth who would seek a star to be remembered beyond the world's end. And the prelude to that moment would be a "Great War" among the lights in the heavens.

That "Great War" was more of a big contest, really. It was a light show to end all light shows, where each star would spin fires to their greatest capacity, varying in degrees according to their individual histories as wards of the night sky. Those who bore witness to the Creation stuttered in their brightness, showing the fatigue of old stars. The twentymillionsomethings were the brightest, flashiest ones of all and, as such, were given godly names by men on earth who were awestruck by their beauty. Then there were the ghosts of the heavens, emitting faint sparkles that were never remembered, because they were never seen. They were all contenders for the Astronomer's eye; all desiring to be recognized as the most beautiful celestial being to be remembered for centuries to come.

Lone star

Haleon was among the phantom stars. He was a nomad who didn't quite fit in with the two cliques he hung out with—the shiners and the specters. He always wanted to be among the shiny, happy ones, yet he was way too young and a bit naive to be in their exclusive star circle. Haleon admired them for their beauty and tenacity, and their ambition to be the greatest star that had ever shone in the night sky. Yet Haleon liked hanging with the invisible posse as well, though he never quite understood why they dreamed too little.

For Haleon dreamed of reaching far. He wanted to shine the brightest. He wanted to be chosen by the Astronomer as the greatest star that ever graced the heavens.

Moonstruck

Thus, one night, Haleon sought help from the wise Luna, the midnight sage.

"How does one become the greatest?" Haleon asked.

"Sweetie, one becomes the greatest only when he loses himself," replied Luna, looking uber-fabulous in her shimmery evening wear.

"What? I can be great when I *lose myself*? But ... but that is lunacy! It does not make sense at all! How can I shine the brightest? Will the great Astronomer notice me? Even give me just a teeny, tiny, you know, peek?"

"Haleon, baby, I think you have a bad case of star complex." said Luna. "I think you need to be alone for a while and discover those answers within you."

And with that, Luna vanished (besides, she had a really hectic nightlife), and left Haleon alone, albeit a bit moonstruck.

The big night

The night of the Star Search had finally arrived. All the stars in the heavens peered excitedly at the Astronomer below. They offered him the most beautiful spectacle of lights ever seen in the earth's history. The ancient stars sparkled. The sons of the first galaxies executed a synchronized, outrageous and psychedelic firedance (something that would have permanently impaired the eyesight of junkies on acid and shrooms several centuries later). And the phantoms, well, they decided to remain backstage and resigned themselves to being spectators of the greatest show on earth and sky. And then there was Haleon.

Haleon twinkled and twinkled, that little star. He sparked up as best as he could in his own little performance space. Yet no matter how hard he tried, he could never shine as bright as the others. Just when he thought he would finally shine, he fizzled even faster than LeeLee Sobieski's career. Finally, Haleon just lost hope. Moving away from the center stage, he headed for the darkest corner of the sky. He was depressed, dejected, and started considering an alternative career moonlighting as a weather reporter for Sky Cable. Pondering alone in the dark, he really, *really* wished he had a nice cold bottle of Lone Star beer at that moment.

And that was when he saw *them*.

Three aged earthly beings, suddenly lost within the darkness that befell them. They looked up and all around them, wondering what sudden, terrible wind had blown all the stars away from the firmament. The trio staggered in the sand dunes, weary from their long travel. Thick robes of sheepskin blanketed them from the relentless desert wind. They were wandering; they were lost. From above, Haleon felt like one of them.

Even in his anxiety, Haleon knew he could not just leave them alone in the sudden maelstrom of darkness. He knew he had to help them out, at least to light the way to the nearest sanctuary where the trio could spend the night. So he sparkled, grooved and moved like a backup dancer in Madonna's Drowned World tour. He stoked even the faintest spark inside of him, gathering every bit of power left inside him. Until he could not feel himself anymore. The bursts of fire grew uncontrollable, and he could no longer contain himself. An intense pain from the heat possessed him, and Haleon realized what was happening. He was going to die.

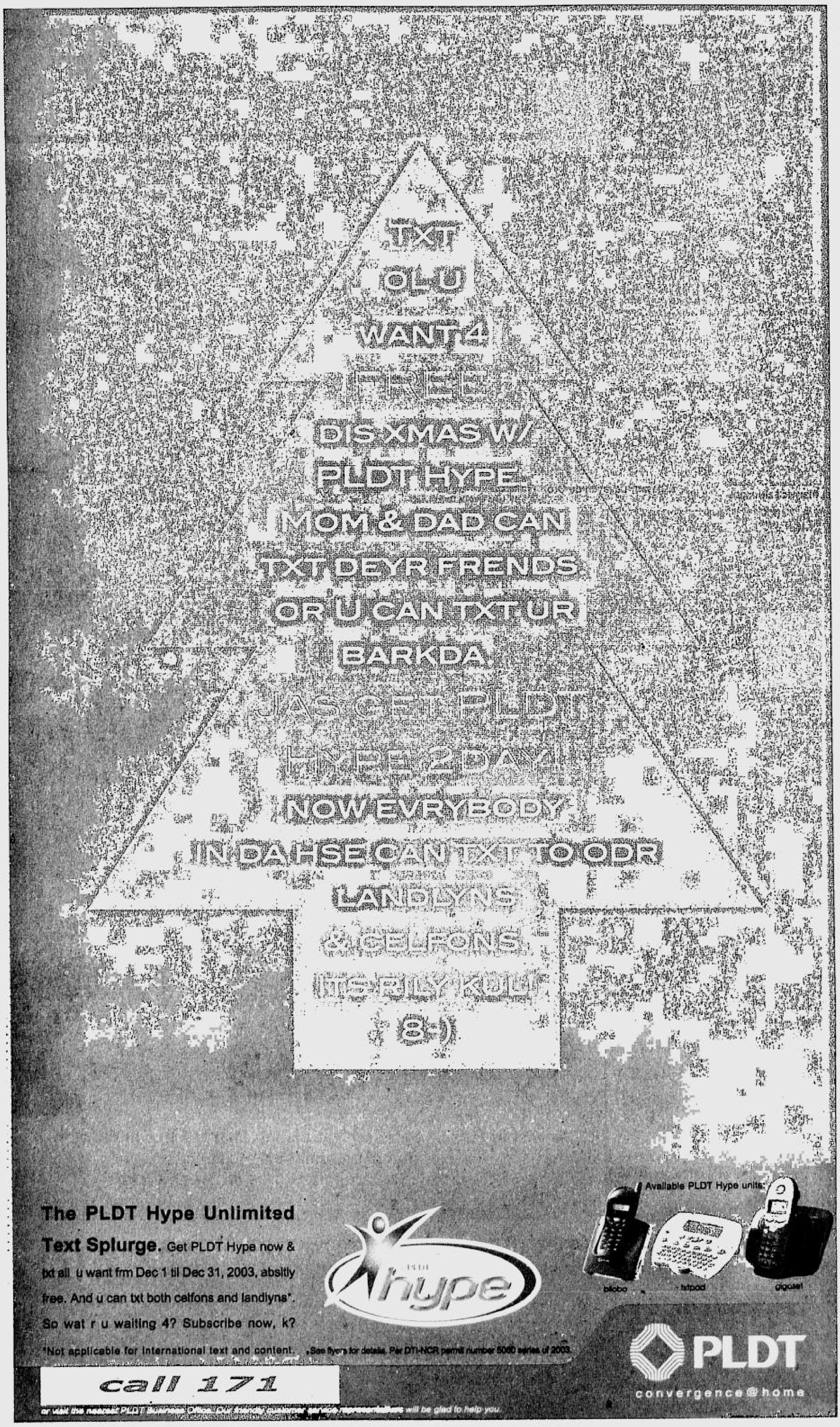
* * *

A burst was seen in the darkest part of the evening sky. For a star had fallen.

On earth, even with their weak eyes, three old men saw the great silvery streak of the brightest shooting star they had ever seen. They traced the path of the fallen star, and it fell on a town not far away.

And somewhere across the earthly desert, a watchful Astronomer had found his star.

Have a very, merry, Christmas full of life, bright stars and endless adventure! Whether you've been naughty or nice, click that mouse button twice and e-mail the author at inca_orange@yahoo.com



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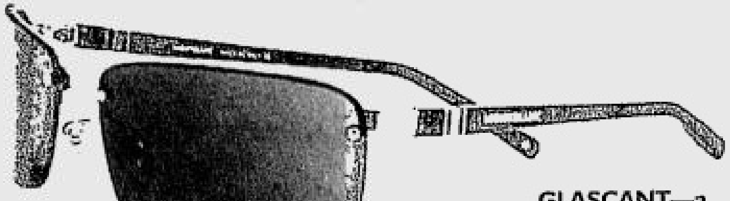

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By Tim Yap

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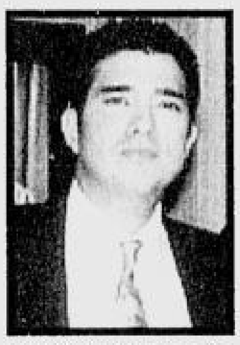

YES YES YO! Francis Magalona in da house

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3. Lolita Amores - Lapasan, Cagayan de Oro

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3. Consuelo S. Payoran - Valenzuela City
4. Joseph Raymond Robles - Taguig

NORTH LUZON
5. Rowena O. Ferrer - Calasiao, Pangasinan
6. Shirley L. Narciso - Mexico, Pampanga
7. Valentina P. Arceo - Porac, Pampanga
8. Hipolita Queyquep - Boquig, Dagupan

SOUTH LUZON
9. Erelyn N. Torres - Sta. Cruz, Laguna
10. Cecilia B. Lao - Bauan, Batangas
11. Kristle C. Naldo - Sta. Rosa, Laguna
12. Virginia L. Napay - Guinobatan, Albay

VISAYAS
13. Angelle P. Abella - Cebu City
14. Maritess R. Marquez - Kabankalan City, Negros
15. Khulene Ann E. Gallo - Bacolod City
16. Rovelyn Bohol - Mandaue City

MINDANAO
17. Minvilu A. Capito - Kauswagan, Cagayan de Oro
18. Corazon Furog - Sasa, Davao City
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5. Corazon Ongtangco - Camarin, Caloocan
6. Jocelyn C. Cadiz - Diliman, Quezon City
7. Consuelo S. Pazoran - Valenzuela City
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10. Maria S. Lisondra - Almanza 2, Las Pinas

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12. Esmeralda Cuaresma - San Fernando, Nueva Ecija
13. Corazon C. Calixto - Olongapo City
14. Cecilia U. Barquota - Dagupan City
15. Marlon S. Garces, Jr. - Gapan, Nueva Ecija
16. Carolina A. Dizon - Dagupan City
17. Lemuel Don Tubera - Cabanatuan City
18. Maria Apilado - Dau Mabalacat, Pampanga
19. Aureloa Co - Balungao, Pangasinan
20. Rosita O. Tayag - Angeles City, Pamapanga

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23. Gerly L. Batralo - San Pablo, Laguna
24. Mercy Villanueva - Dasmarinas, Cavite
25. Josie M. Villegas - Cabuyao, Laguna
26. Emerciana R. Barsomo - Dolores, Quezon
27. Remedios M. Bacil - Cabuyao, Laguna
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36. Revely G. Chavez - Sibunog, Guimaras
37. Ryan D. Resma - Mandurriao, Iloilo City
38. Jonathan Bacalso - Inayawan, Cebu City
39. Rommel P. Cabrera - SM City, Cebu City
40. Elisa B. Ambuhat - Cebu City

MINDANAO
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42. Joan Cristine C. Briones - Cagayan de Oro
43. Judith C. Dominise - Davao City
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45. Rosita L. Eulogio - Ma-a, Davao City
46. Doris B. Uy - Bangkal, Davao City
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Traditional
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Hallelujah Chorus
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Angels We Have Heard On High
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MTONE [illegible]

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Traditional
MTONE JINGLEROCK

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MTONE ILLBE

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Traditional
MTONE SLEIGH

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The Chipmunks
MTONE CHIPMUNK

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MTONE WHATCHILD

Numb
Linkin Park
MTONE NUMB

In The End
Linkin Park
MTONE INTHEEND

I'll Be
Edwin McCain
MTONE [illegible]

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MTONE JINGLEBELLS

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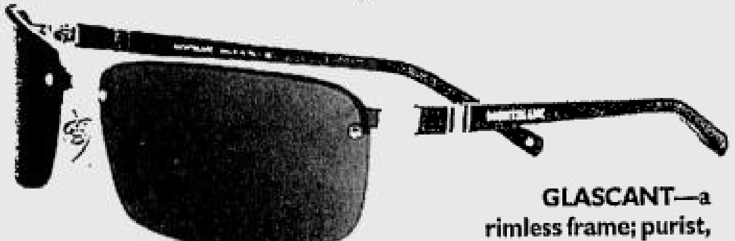

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Fill in the blanc

By Tim Yap

STARS filled the Skytop of the Intercon Hotel when the everest of eyewear, Montblanc launched its modern shapes and styles with a photo exhibit of achievers in various fields from education to the arts.

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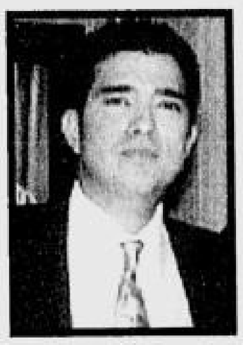
J POP. John Estrada

MULTI-FACETED Michael V.

FOR YOUR eyes only, Randy Santiago



YES YES YO! Francis Magalona in da house

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Congratulations sa lahat ng winners na natupad ang paskong pangarap para sa kanilang pamilya!

WINNERS OF ₱300,000.00 IN CASH

LUZON
1. Teresita O. Camerino - Calatagan, Batangas

VISAYAS
2. Princess M. Lavega - San Jose, Antique

MINDANAO
3. Lolita Amores - Lapasan, Cagayan de Oro

WINNERS OF ₱20,000.00 IN CASH

GMA
1. Jelo M. Aput - Caloocan City
2. Rosalia A. Vergara - Pandacan, Manila
3. Consuelo S. Payoran - Valenzuela City
4. Joseph Raymond Robles - Taguig

NORTH LUZON
5. Rowena O. Ferrer - Calasiao, Pangasinan
6. Shirley L. Narciso - Mexico, Pampanga
7. Valentina P. Arceo - Porac, Pampanga
8. Hipolita Queyquep - Boquig, Dagupan

SOUTH LUZON
9. Erelyn N. Torres - Sta. Cruz, Laguna
10. Cecilia B. Lao - Bauan, Batangas
11. Kristie C. Naldo - Sta. Rosa, Laguna
12. Virginia L. Napay - Guinobatan, Albay

VISAYAS
13. Angelie P. Abella - Cebu City
14. Maritess R. Marquez - Kabankalan City, Negros
15. Khulene Ann E. Gallo - Bacolod City
16. Rovelyn Bohol - Mandaue City

MINDANAO
17. Minvilu A. Capito - Kauswagan, Cagayan de Oro
18. Corazon Furog - Sasa, Davao City
19. Lynn Camille Flores - Iponan, Cagayan de Oro
20. Lorenza C. Estoce - Tibungao, Davao City

WINNERS OF ₱5,000.00 IN CASH

GMA
1. Alberto Sorillo - San Roque, Marikina
2. Ramon Pedragoza - Diliman, Quezon City
3. Rodolfo Acta - Balintawak, Quezon City
4. Liza D. Garcia - La Loma, Quezon City
5. Corazon Ongtangco - Camarin, Caloocan
6. Jocelyn C. Cadiz - Diliman, Quezon City
7. Consuelo S. Pazoran - Valenzuela City
8. Corazon Daylo - Valle Verde, Pasig
9. Carmina S. Broas - Malabon
10. Maria S. Lisondra - Almanza 2, Las Pinas

NORTH LUZON
11. Josielyn M. Elisan - Subic, Zambales
12. Esmeralda Cuaresma - San Fernando, Nueva Ecija
13. Corazon C. Calixto - Olongapo City
14. Cecilia U. Barqueta - Dagupan City
15. Marlon S. Garces, Jr. - Gapan, Nueva Ecija
16. Carolina A. Dizon - Dagupan City
17. Lemuel Don Tubera - Cabanatuan City
18. Maria Apilado - Dau Mabalacat, Pampanga
19. Aurelea Co - Balungao, Pangasinan
20. Rosita O. Tayag - Angeles City, Pamapanga

SOUTH LUZON
21. Maritess M. Pamintuan - Calamba, Laguna
22. Pacita S. Bautista - Imus, Cavite
23. Gerly L. Batralo - San Pablo, Laguna
24. Mercy Villanueva - Dasmarinas, Cavite
25. Josie M. Villegas - Cabuyao, Laguna
26. Emerciana R. Barsomo - Dolores, Quezon
27. Remedios M. Bacli - Cabuyao, Laguna
28. Mira C. De Dios - Cotta, Lucena City
29. Judy Magyaya - Sta. Rosa, Laguna
30. Soledad B. Isaac - Iriga City

VISAYAS
31. Ellie E. Alipato - Singcag, Bacolod City
32. Luzviminda Cabillon - Pardo, Cebu City
33. Danilo S. Nunez - Lahug, Cebu City
34. Grace G. Ouano - Cebu City
35. Nenyphar L. Derapas - Molo, Iloilo City
36. Revely G. Chavez - Sibunog, Guimaras
37. Ryan D. Resma - Mandurriao, Iloilo City
38. Jonathan Bacalso - Inayawan, Cebu City
39. Rommel P. Cabrera - SM City, Cebu City
40. Elisa B. Ambuhat - Cebu City

MINDANAO
41. Filomena P. Vergara - Comval Province
42. Joan Cristine C. Briones - Cagayan de Oro
43. Judith C. Dominise - Davao City
44. Reino E. Molina - San Roque, Zamboanga City
45. Rosita L. Eulogio - Ma-a, Davao City
46. Doris B. Uy - Bangkal, Davao City
47. Salome M. Villanueva - Ma-a, Davao City
48. Marilie Certifico - Tugbali, Davao City
49. Elmie L. Eleo - Macasandig, Cagayan de Oro
50. Loudomer Olarte Lagaman - Pitik, Zamboanga City

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MTONE HARK

O Holy Night
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Traditional
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Traditional
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Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas
Traditional
MTONE HAVEUR

Ave Maria
Church
MTONE AVEMARIA

O Come All Ye Faithful
Traditional
MTONE OCOME

Hallelujah Chorus
Johnny Mathis
MTONE HALLELU

Angels We Have Heard On High
Neil Diamond
MTONE ANGELSWE

For Once In My Life
Michael Buble
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Rudolph The Red Nose Reindeer
Traditional
MTONE RUDOLPH

Jingle Bell Rock
Traditional
MTONE JINGLEROCK

I'll Be Home For Christmas
Traditional
MTONE ILLBE

Sleigh Ride
Traditional
MTONE SLEIGH

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The Chipmunks
MTONE CHIPMUNK

What Child Is This
Traditional
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Linkin Park
MTONE NUMB

In The End
Linkin Park
MTONE INTHEEND

I'll Be
Edwin McCain
MTONE IBE

Jingle Bells
Traditional
MTONE JINGLEBELLS

Joy To The World
Traditional
MTONE JOYWORLD

Santa Claus Is Coming To Town
Traditional
MTONE SANTACLAUS

Silent Night
Traditional
MTONE SILENTNITE

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Foo Fighters
MTONE HAVIT

Rock The Boat
Aaliyah
MTONE ROCKTHE

Rain On Me
Ashanti
MTONE RAINON

So Yesterday
Hilary Duff
MTONE SOYDAY

Trouble
Pink
MTONE TROUBLE

Spaghetti Song
Sexbomb
MTONE SPAG

Turning Japanese
Vapors
MTONE JAPANS

Rubberneckin
Elvis
MTONE RUBBER

Somewhere I Belong
Linkin Park
MTONE SOMEWHERE

Asereje
Las Ketchup
MTONE ASEREJE

Mr. Suave
Parokya ni Edgar
MTONE [illegible]

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Merry Xmas Everbody
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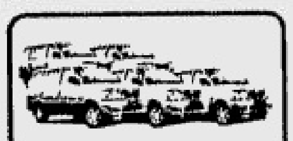

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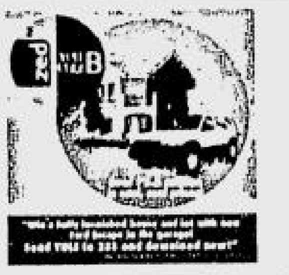

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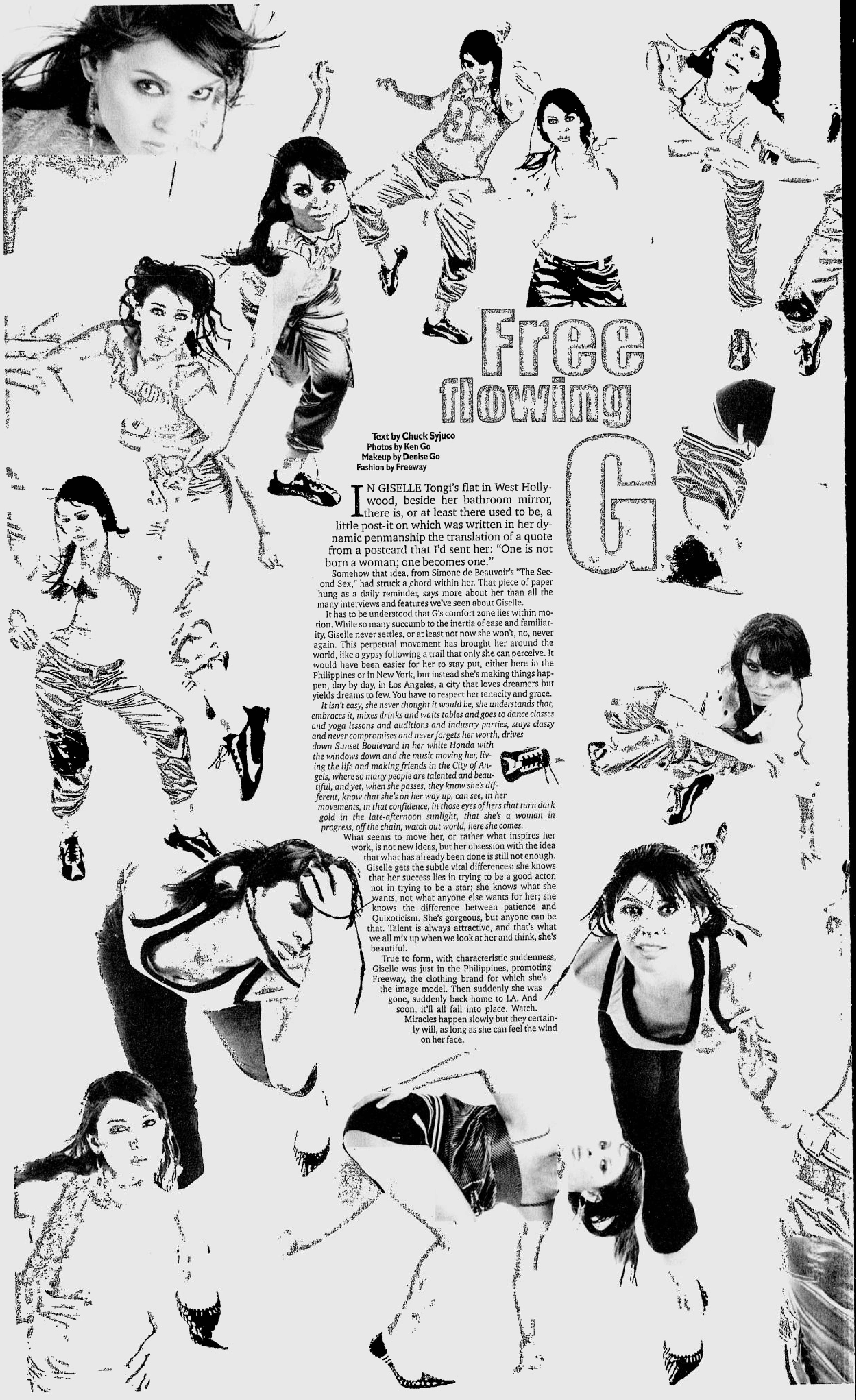

Free flowing G

Text by Chuck Syjuco
Photos by Ken Go
Makeup by Denise Go
Fashion by Freeway

IN GISELLE Tongi's flat in West Hollywood, beside her bathroom mirror, there is, or at least there used to be, a little post-it on which was written in her dynamic penmanship the translation of a quote from a postcard that I'd sent her: "One is not born a woman; one becomes one."

Somehow that idea, from Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex," had struck a chord within her. That piece of paper hung as a daily reminder, says more about her than all the many interviews and features we've seen about Giselle.

It has to be understood that G's comfort zone lies within motion. While so many succumb to the inertia of ease and familiarity, Giselle never settles, or at least not now she won't, no, never again. This perpetual movement has brought her around the world, like a gypsy following a trail that only she can perceive. It would have been easier for her to stay put, either here in the Philippines or in New York, but instead she's making things happen, day by day, in Los Angeles, a city that loves dreamers but yields dreams to few. You have to respect her tenacity and grace.

It isn't easy, she never thought it would be, she understands that, embraces it, mixes drinks and waits tables and goes to dance classes and yoga lessons and auditions and industry parties, stays classy and never compromises and never forgets her worth, drives down Sunset Boulevard in her white Honda with the windows down and the music moving her, living the life and making friends in the City of Angels, where so many people are talented and beautiful, and yet, when she passes, they know she's different, know that she's on her way up, can see, in her movements, in that confidence, in those eyes of hers that turn dark gold in the late-afternoon sunlight, that she's a woman in progress, off the chain, watch out world, here she comes.

What seems to move her, or rather what inspires her work, is not new ideas, but her obsession with the idea that what has already been done is still not enough. Giselle gets the subtle vital differences: she knows that her success lies in trying to be a good actor, not in trying to be a star; she knows what she wants, not what anyone else wants for her; she knows the difference between patience and Quixoticism. She's gorgeous, but anyone can be that. Talent is always attractive, and that's what we all mix up when we look at her and think, she's beautiful.

True to form, with characteristic suddenness, Giselle was just in the Philippines, promoting Freeway, the clothing brand for which she's the image model. Then suddenly she was gone, suddenly back home to LA. And soon, it'll all fall into place. Watch. Miracles happen slowly but they certainly will, as long as she can feel the wind on her face.

It might be easier for her to stay put in Manila or New York; instead she builds a life, day by day, in Los Angeles, a city that loves dreamers but yields dreams to few

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SHUNJI and Kaz of Twisted, Wave @ EightBall

Symphonies of the Season

the lounge
Second Level, The Podium

December 10, 5pm (Wednesday)
Pop Lola Press Launch
by **Armida Siguion-Reyna**

December 11, 8pm (Thursday)
Deck the Malls, Sounds of Christmas
featuring **In Hymn A Capella Choir**

December 17, 7pm (Wednesday)
Let Heaven and Nature Sing
featuring **Musicworx Ensemble**

December 18, 7pm (Thursday)
Kundi Krismas
featuring **The Kundirana Ministry**

December 19, 7pm (Friday)
Kundi Krismas
featuring **The Kundirana Ministry**

December 20, 8pm (Saturday)
Deck the Malls, Sounds of Christmas
featuring **Ateneo de Manila College Glee Club**

December 22, 8pm (Monday)
Deck the Malls, Sounds of Christmas
featuring **Bagong Himig Alumni Choir**

December 23, 5pm (Tuesday)
Kundirana - The Instrument
featuring **the Manila Philharmonic Orchestra**

December 27, 7pm (Saturday)
Let Your Praises Be Heard
by **Bukas Palad**

December 30, 7pm (Tuesday)
Sampaguita Performing Group

WAVE 89.1
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FAN-TABULOUS

A super! DJ diary

By Tim Yap

TUCK Cheah, the spinmaster behind all those Big Fish raves, is the smartest of them all. Before the party season peaked in Manila, he was out and about, club-hopping from Chicago to San Francisco to New York, waving the Philippine flag high, so to speak, as he dished out his own brand of soulful muzak. Check out how one of "our own" (adopted, really, since he's actually Malaysian, but chose to stay and call Manila his home) conquered DJ La La Land.

Have celeb conquest stories that you wanna share with Super? Drop us a line, and send your photos, to super@inquirer.com.ph

DJ SUMMIT. Mei-Lwun of Solstice, Gianni and Gruiv of Spundae with Tuck Cheah

MAURICIO and Andy Caldwell of Naked Music @ Ms Sixty Opening

DIMITRI of Deelite @ Eighball, NY

TRULY A BIG FISH. TC at Sonic 1015 Folsom

TC journal

By Tuck Cheah

Wednesday

Arrived San Francisco and met at the airport by Gianni. Then, straight to Taj's (resident Spundae) place around Haight St. where I was staying during my stay in SF.

Checked out some interesting shops along Haight that afternoon and then turned in early.

Thursday

Records shopping at Tweekin and In-house for the day. In-house run by Phil American DJ Leonard and partner Naz. Just about a year old but the busiest store in SF, so if you are hunting for good music, check it out. Bumped into Tony of Tango Records and Behrouz (Release long-time resident). Hooked up with Mei-Lwun (Soulstice) and ended up at Love Slap happy hours with Gianni and Guiv (co founder of Spundae). Later, Mei-Lwun invited us to Ms. Sixty launch party sponsored by Naked Music. DJs for the occasion were Andy Caldwell and Maurizio.

Friday

It's my big night tonight at 1015 Folsom, SF legendary venue. Ask me that five years ago, I would have said, it'll be a dream. So, nothing is impossible. The venue has four rooms but only three were opened that night. The first floor was R&B and hip-hop and the third floor was banging hard house. I was opening the main room for the night at 11. The lighting was awesome and the laser really powerful. They have the EAW, Avalon sound system and you got to experience it rather than have me put it in words. I have checked out some wicked clubs with the best DJ consoles. I would rate this console second to ARC (Danny Tenaglia's club) in NY. Turnout for the night was not too good. Taj said the headline DJ did not have a very big pull in SF. Then again, the experience of playing the main room is by far one of my most memorable.

Saturday

My second gig for Spundae at Circus, LA. Massive venue with two rooms and a beautiful court yard. Coincidentally, it was the opening night of a new club Avalon, with guest Paul Oakenfold. Surprisingly, the venue was jam-packed. A lot of Asians go to Circus. Made me feel very much at home. The main room where I opened again was a lot bigger than 1015. James Zabiela who was meant to play after me was late, so Jimmy Van M played next. James took the last set and tore the place up. Heaps of train spotters and groupies around him. Bumped into Lisa Loud as she was in town for another gig the previous night.

Sunday

Sometimes, this world is really small. Bumped into Martin Nievera while I was checking out of the hotel. Next stop NYC.

Monday

For the next four days, hanging out with Shunji (8 Ball records) in NYC. Shunji hooked up a gig for me on 10/9. Unfortunately the gig got canceled. So, no gigs in NY, only for nice days of good food, shopping and club hopping.

Friday

Coming to Chicago for the first time. Probably the most beautiful and modern skyline among all the cities I've been to in the States. Most important of all, it's also where House music was born. Matt, Spundae's main man in Chicago was not around, so I was shown around instead by their promoter, Adam.

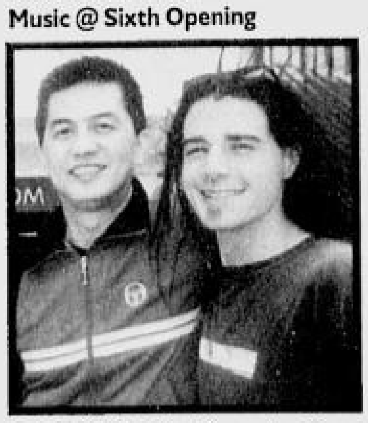
Saturday

My last gig for the tour and it's at Spundae's weekly residence at Vision. This venue is amazing, with four levels like a theater. Sleek architecture with beautiful stained glass and mirrors and more bars than any club I have ever been to.

Out of the three gigs, I was a little concerned with the last. Firstly, it was in Chicago, with so much dance music history, that expectations from clubbers were bound to be really high. The flyer said it was a Logical Progression night with drum-and-bass maestro LTJ Bukem and MC Conrad! Imagine playing the opening set with a house full of d&b heads. Much to my surprise, it turned out to be a very good night. A lot of Fil-ams came for the gig. After my set, one actually came up to me, shook my hand and said, "You made me proud. You are the first Asian to play here, bro, and that hit me right here." Sometimes, it's not how many people enjoy the set; all it takes is one of them coming up to you that makes all the difference.

By the way, he was nice enough to bring me a Balikbayan box the next day. For sure, Adam would not have known where to find one!

SMART SET. Bruno of Naked Music @ Sixth Opening


ADDICTED. Taj of Spundae @ Vapor Room Upper Height

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